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The Story of EUROVISION

★ NEW!

Dive into the glitzy, glamorous and often gobsmacking world of Europe's greatest show

Celebrating **50 YEARS OF ABBA'S 'WATERLOO'**

THE ORIGINS OF A CONTINENTAL CONTEST

WACKY ACTS AND WEIRD SONGS

MEET THE SHOW'S BIGGEST STARS

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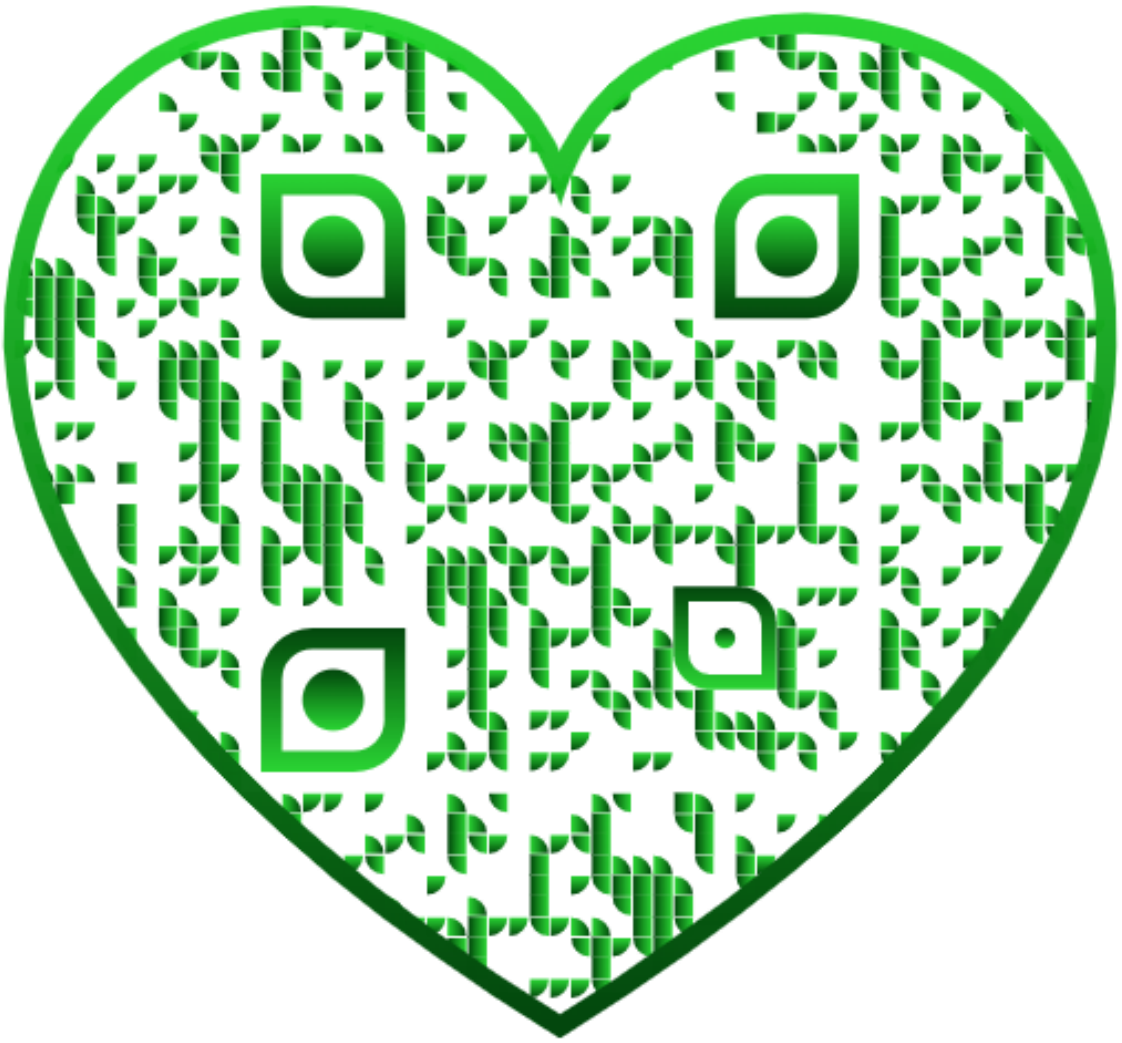

WELCOME TO THE CRAZIEST SHOW ON EARTH

"It's supposed to be bad. And the worse it is, the more fun it is." So said Sir Terry Wogan of the musical bonanza that he covered for over 30 years for the BBC. Most Eurovision fans would probably agree with his playful assessment, but many may never have stopped to wonder why there was ever a multinational music contest for the beloved Irishman to comment on in the first place. How, and just as importantly, why did Europe come together to create such a unique and widely celebrated festival of funny songs, fantastic outfits and fiercely political voting?

Well, put on your finest flashy attire, brush up on Eastern European hits from the '80s and let's take a plunge into the history of this intriguing show. From its origins in the mid-1950s to the show's most remarkable moments and the recent technologically charged contests that gave us Måneskin, Sam Ryder and many more brilliant acts, this is the story of the show that united a continent through its love of music.

FUTURE

The Story of EUROVISION

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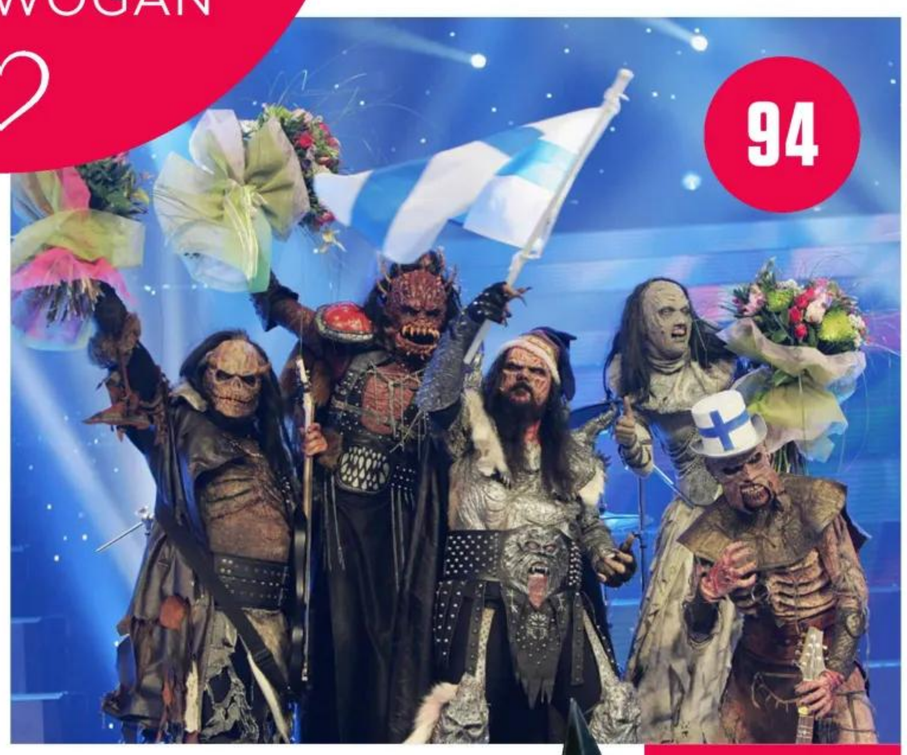

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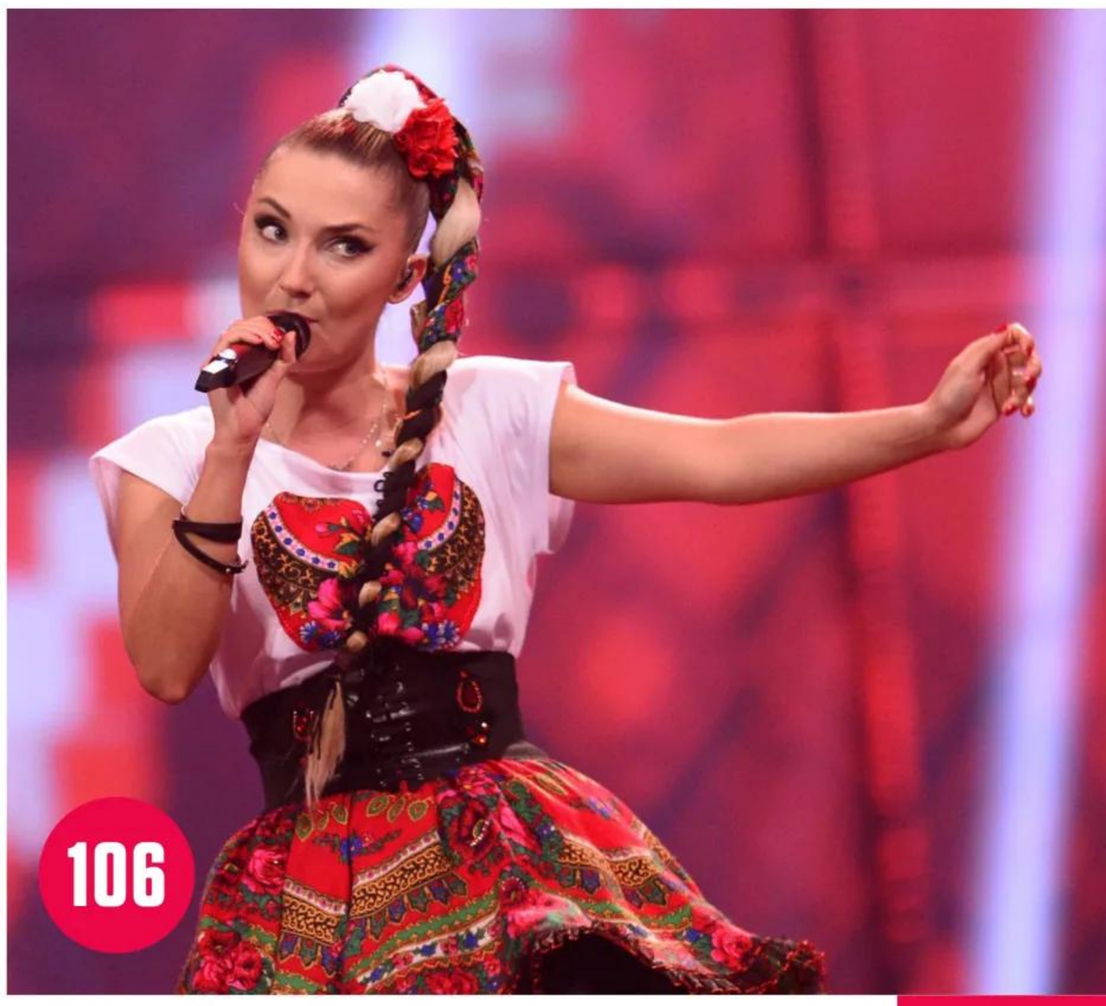

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TIMELINE

1956 — *Switzerland*
CITY **LUGANO**
VENUE **TEATRO KURSAAL**

1957 — *Germany*
CITY **FRANKFURT-AM-MAIN**
VENUE **TEATR GROSSER SENDESAAL DES HESSISCHEN RUNDFUNKS O KURSAAL**

1958 — *Netherlands*
CITY **HILVERSUM**
VENUE **AVRO STUDIOS**

1959 — *France*
CITY **CANNES**
VENUE **PALAIS DES FESTIVALS**

1960 — *United Kingdom*
CITY **LONDON**
VENUE **ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL**

1961 — *France*
CITY **CANNES**
VENUE **PALAIS DES FESTIVALS**

1973 — *Luxembourg*
CITY **LUXEMBOURG CITY**
VENUE **THÉÂTRE MUNICIPAL**

1974 — *United Kingdom*
CITY **BRIGHTON**
VENUE **BRIGHTON DOME**

1975 — *Sweden*
CITY **STOCKHOLM**
VENUE **ST. ERIKS MÄSSAN**

1976 — *Netherlands*
CITY **THE HAGUE**
VENUE **NEDERLANDS CONGRESGEBOUW**

1977 — *United Kingdom*
CITY **LONDON**
VENUE **WEMBLEY CONFERENCE CENTRE**

1978 — *France*
CITY **PARIS**
VENUE **PALAIS DES CONGRÈS**

1979 — *Israel*
CITY **JERUSALEM**
VENUE **INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTER**

1980 — *Netherlands*
CITY **THE HAGUE**
VENUE **NEDERLANDS CONGRESGEBOUW**

1981 — *Ireland*
CITY **DUBLIN**
VENUE **RDS SIMMONSCOURT PAVILION**

1982 — *United Kingdom*
CITY **HARROGATE**
VENUE **HARROGATE CONFERENCE CENTRE**

1983 — *Germany*
CITY **MUNICH**
VENUE **RUDI-SEDLMAYER-HALLE**

1995 — *Ireland*
CITY **DUBLIN**
VENUE **POINT THEATRE**

1996 — *Norway*
CITY **OSLO**
VENUE **OSLO SPEKTRUM**

1997 — *Ireland*
CITY **DUBLIN**
VENUE **POINT THEATRE**

1998 — *United Kingdom*
CITY **BIRMINGHAM**
VENUE **NATIONAL INDOOR ARENA**

1999 — *Israel*
CITY **JERUSALEM**
VENUE **INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTER**

2000 — *Sweden*
CITY **STOCKHOLM**
VENUE **GLOBE ARENA**

2001 — *Denmark*
CITY **COPENHAGEN**
VENUE **PARKEN STADIUM**

2002 — *Estonia*
CITY **TALLINN**
VENUE **SAKU SUURHALL**

2003 — *Latvia*
CITY **RIGA**
VENUE **SKONTO OLYMPIC HALL**

2004 — *Turkey*
CITY **ISTANBUL**
VENUE **ABDI İPEKÇI ARENA**

2005 — *Ukraine*
CITY **KYIV**
VENUE **PALACE OF SPORTS**

2019 — *Israel*
CITY **TEL AVIV**
VENUE **EXPO TEL AVIV**

2020 — *Netherlands*
CITY **ROTTERDAM**
VENUE **ROTTERDAM AHOY**

2021 — *Netherlands*
CITY **ROTTERDAM**
VENUE **ROTTERDAM AHOY**

2022 — *Italy*
CITY **TURIN**
VENUE **PALAOLIMPICO**

2023 — *United Kingdom*
CITY **LIVERPOOL**
VENUE **LIVERPOOL ARENA**

2024 — *Sweden*
CITY **MALMÖ**
VENUE **MALMÖ ARENA**

1962 — *Luxembourg*
CITY **LUXEMBOURG CITY**
VENUE **VILLA LOUVIGNY**

1963 — *United Kingdom*
CITY **LONDON**
VENUE **BBC TELEVISION CENTRE**

1964 — *Denmark*
CITY **COPENHAGEN**
VENUE **TIVOLIS KONCERTSAL**

1965 — *Italy*
CITY **NAPLES**
VENUE **SALA DI CONCERTO DELLA RAI**

1966 — *Luxembourg*
CITY **LUXEMBOURG CITY**
VENUE **VILLA LOUVIGNY**

1967 — *Austria*
CITY **VIENNA**
VENUE **GROSSER FESTSAAL DER WIENER HOFBURG**

1968 — *United Kingdom*
CITY **LONDON**
VENUE **ROYAL ALBERT HALL**

1969 — *Spain*
CITY **MADRID**
VENUE **TEATRO REAL**

1970 — *Netherlands*
CITY **AMSTERDAM**
VENUE **RAI CONGRESCENTRUM**

1971 — *Ireland*
CITY **DUBLIN**
VENUE **GAIETY THEATRE**

1972 — *United Kingdom*
CITY **EDINBURGH**
VENUE **USHER HALL**

1973 — *Luxembourg*
CITY **LUXEMBOURG CITY**
VENUE **THÉÂTRE MUNICIPAL**

1974 — *Sweden*
CITY **GOTHENBURG**
VENUE **SCANDINAVIUM**

1975 — *Norway*
CITY **BERGEN**
VENUE **GRIEGHALLEN**

1976 — *Belgium*
CITY **BRUSSELS**
VENUE **PALAIS DU CENTENAIRE**

1977 — *Ireland*
CITY **DUBLIN**
VENUE **RDS SIMMONSCOURT PAVILION**

1978 — *Ireland*
CITY **DUBLIN**
VENUE **POINT THEATRE**

1979 — *Ireland*
CITY **MILLSTREET**
VENUE **GREEN GLENS ARENA**

1980 — *Sweden*
CITY **MALMÖ**
VENUE **MALMÖ ISSTADION**

1981 — *Italy*
CITY **ROME**
VENUE **STUDIO 15 DE CINECITTÀ**

1982 — *Yugoslavia*
CITY **ZAGREB**
VENUE **KONCERTNA DVORANA VATROSLAV LISINSKI**

1983 — *Switzerland*
CITY **LAUSANNE**
VENUE **PALAIS DE BEAULIEU**

2006 — *Greece*
CITY **ATHENS**
VENUE **OLYMPIC INDOOR HALL**

2007 — *Finland*
CITY **HELSINKI**
VENUE **HARTWALL ARENA**

2008 — *Serbia*
CITY **BELGRADE**
VENUE **BELGRADE ARENA**

2009 — *Russia*
CITY **MOSCOW**
VENUE **OLIMPIYSKY ARENA**

2010 — *Norway*
CITY **OSLO**
VENUE **TELENOR ARENA**

2011 — *Germany*
CITY **DÜSSELDORF**
VENUE **DÜSSELDORF ARENA**

2018 — *Portugal*
CITY **LISBON**
VENUE **LISBON ARENA**

2017 — *Ukraine*
CITY **KYIV**
VENUE **INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION CENTRE**

2016 — *Sweden*
CITY **STOCKHOLM**
VENUE **GLOBE ARENA**

2015 — *Austria*
CITY **VIENNA**
VENUE **WIENER STADTHALLE**

2014 — *Denmark*
CITY **COPENHAGEN**
VENUE **B&W HALLERNE**

2013 — *Sweden*
CITY **MALMÖ**
VENUE **MALMÖ ARENA**

2012 — *Azerbaijan*
CITY **BAKU**
VENUE **BAKU CRYSTAL HALL**

EUROVISION'S GREATEST ACTS

From skirt-ripping pop to headbanging trolls, meet the finest acts ever to grace the Eurovision stage

Sam Ryder 2022

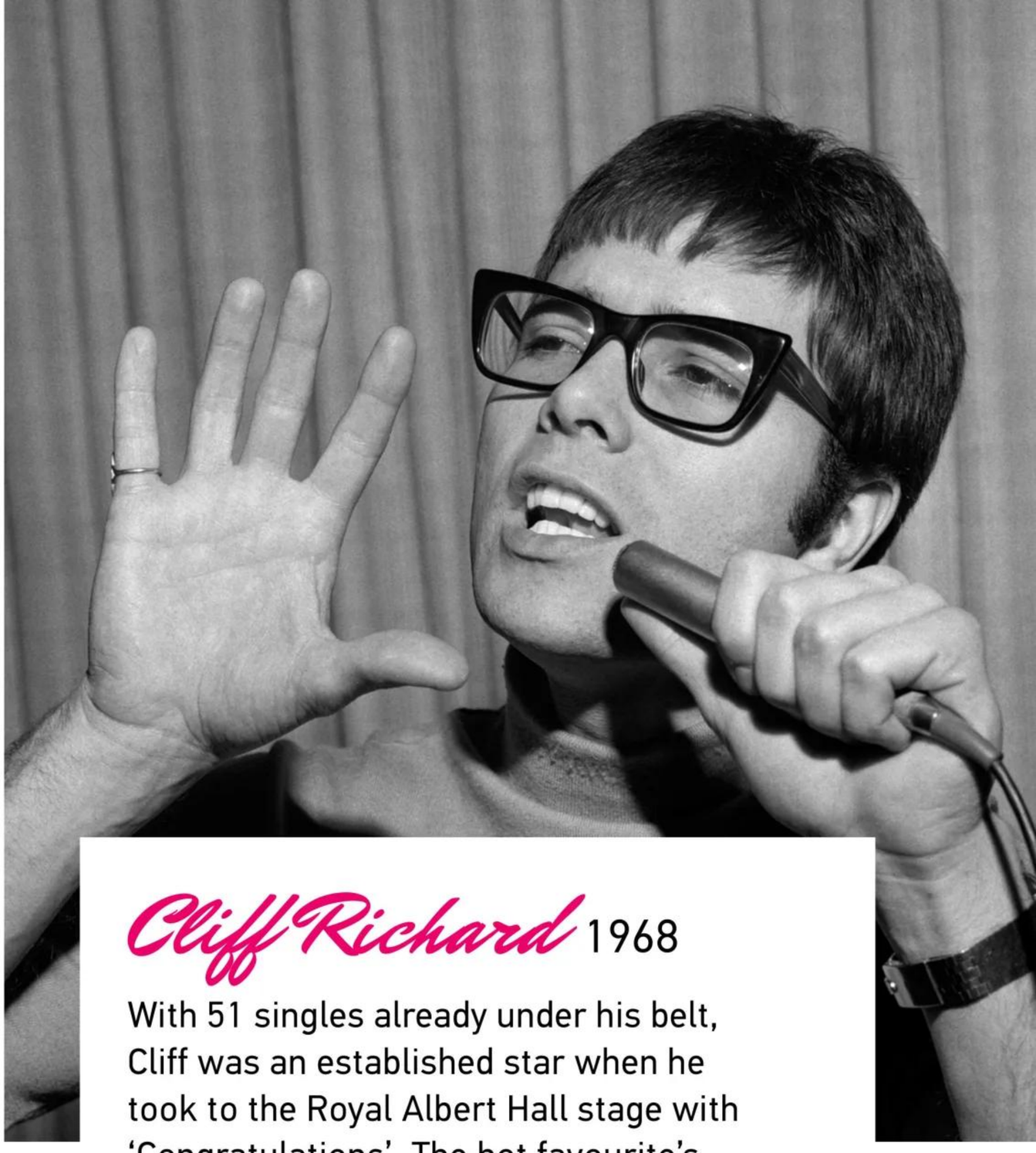
After years of slog on the function band circuit, nobody deserved a break more than this Essex singer-songwriter. Ryder's UK entry 'Space Man' was a wistful, falsetto-fuelled ballad that finished second, and his boy-next-door charm did the rest, sending debut album *There's Nothing But Space, Man!* to UK#1. He's played his last wedding.

© Getty Images, Alamy

Bucks Fizz 1981

The UK quartet's perky 'Making Your Mind Up' romped home with 136 points, and while the chorus hook was pop gold, Bucks Fizz's victory was ensured by a sweetly risqué moment of Eurovision theatre as Bobby G and Mike Nolan whipped off the skirts of Cheryl Baker and Jay Aston.

"VICTORY WAS ENSURED AS BOBBY G AND MIKE NOLAN WHIPPED OFF THE SKIRTS OF BAKER AND ASTON"



Cliff Richard 1968

With 51 singles already under his belt, Cliff was an established star when he took to the Royal Albert Hall stage with 'Congratulations'. The hot favourite's cheerful earworm lost out to Spanish entry 'La, La, La' by a single point, but with 'Congratulations' hitting #1 across Europe and paving Cliff's path to national treasure status, the bachelor boy had the last laugh.

Lordi 2006

The continent's children cowered behind sofas as the Finnish metallers arrived in warts-and-all monster regalia to crank out 'Hard Rock Hallelujah'. With the stage spewing pyrotechnics and bat-winged singer Mr Lordi rocking a battleaxe-shaped mic stand, it's the most headbanging entry in Eurovision history, like a Jim Henson movie turned up to 11.

© Getty Images, Alamy

Dana International 1998

The Israeli pop star's dancefloor-tooled 'Diva' was a deserved favourite in Birmingham, but a quarter of a century later she remains a Eurovision icon for reasons bigger than music. As the contest's first transsexual winner, Dana faced stinging criticism from Israel's Orthodox Jewish community but soldiered on to strike a seismic early blow for LGBTQ+ rights.

"THE CONTEST'S FIRST TRANSSEXUAL WINNER, DANA FACED CRITICISM FROM ISRAEL'S ORTHODOX JEWS"

Celine Dion 1988

Before *Titanic*, before 'The Power of Love', Celine Dion was a 19-year-old Eurovision longshot. But the singer's gravity-defying soprano vocal on 'Ne Partez Pas Sans Moi' left the Dublin audience in no doubt they were watching a star being born. The Canadian's march towards 200 million record sales started here.

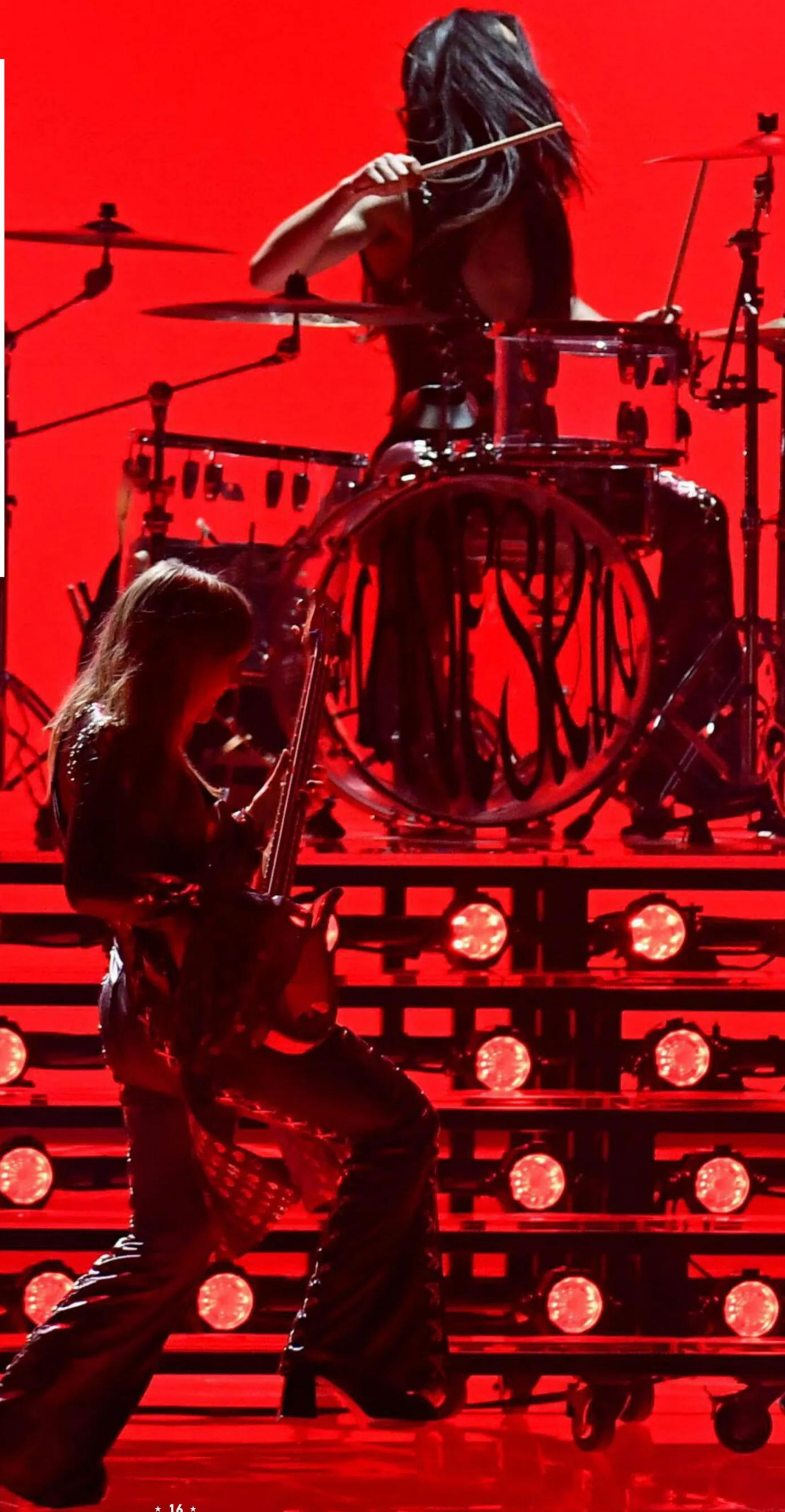
Loreen 2012

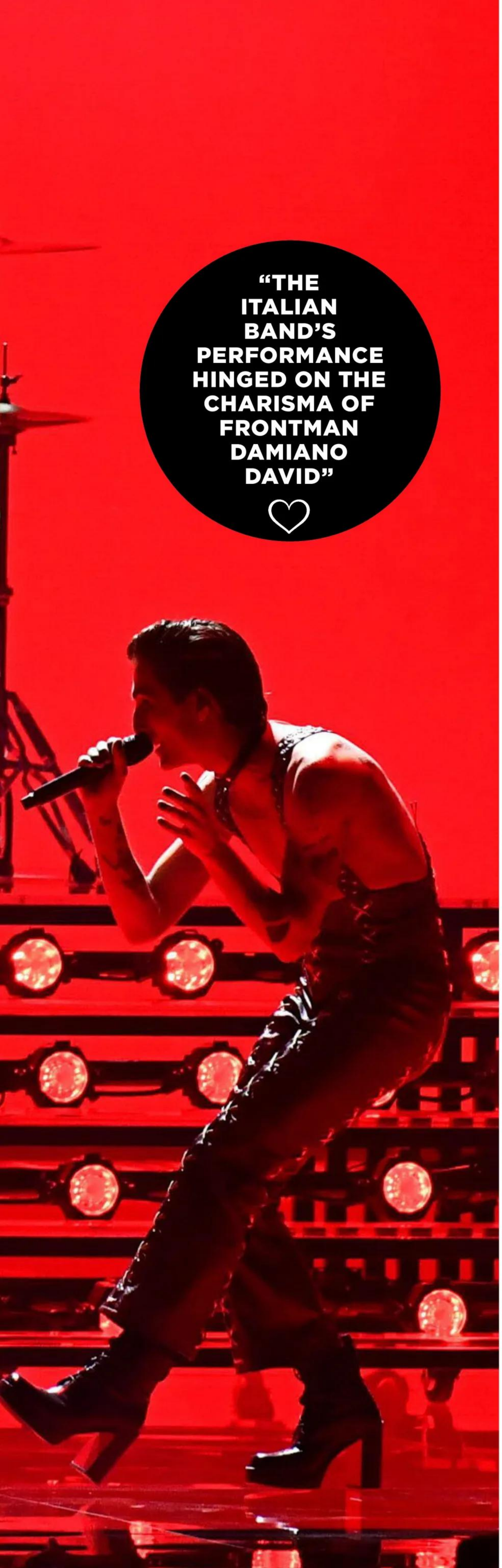
Whirling like an ice-queen clubber among strobe lights and snowfall, the Swedish singer's 'Euphoria' was a Eurobeat banger that blew the roof off the Crystal Hall Arena in Azerbaijan. The world agreed, with a record-breaking 18 countries giving Loreen the maximum 12 points and the single flying to UK#3.

© Getty Images, Alamy

Måneskin 2021

Widely considered the contest's greatest rock moment, the Italian band's performance of 'Zitti E Buoni' hinged on the industrial-strength charisma of frontman Damiano David, a shadow-eyed provocateur in leather chaps whose shoot-from-the-lip rap flows were genuinely electrifying. After months of pandemic misery, it was the anthem we needed to blow away the cobwebs.





“THE ITALIAN BAND’S PERFORMANCE HINGED ON THE CHARISMA OF FRONTMAN DAMIANO DAVID”

Kalush Orchestra 2022

With Russian tanks rolling into Ukraine as the Kalush Orchestra took to the stage in Turin, some said victory was a foregone conclusion. For sure, the 631 points bestowed upon ‘Stefania’ was a show of peaceful protest to President Putin, but this was no sympathy vote, with the track’s powerful splice of hip-hop and traditional Ukrainian music loaded with defiance.

ABBA 1974

Who else? ABBA’s victory with ‘Waterloo’ remains the contest’s undisputed flagship moment: a planet-aligning performance that saw the perfect pop group showcase their best song on the world stage in foot-high platform heels. The Swedes would go on to even greater glories, but as Björn Ulvaeus reflected, “The Eurovision Song Contest is one hell of a launching pad.”

© Getty Images, Alamy

FOUNDING THE FESTIVAL

We all love the fun and drama of the show, but how and why was the Eurovision Song Contest created in the first place?

WORDS **NINA MATTIELLO AZADEH**

The first Eurovision Song Contest was a celebration of music, talent and live transmission, where 14 contestants from seven countries came together to create history.

Italian roots

Italy has a long and rich music history; from the ancient Romans, who composed the 'Secular Ode of Horace' in 17 BCE, to some of the greatest operatic composers, to more recently the cult rock band Måneskin. Traditional Italian music has become a defining part of music and Italy's history. The Risorgimento, the movement that fought for the unification of Italy, used Verdi's music as its rallying call, and since the 1950s the country has hosted the Festival di Sanremo, a festival of Italian music.

As well as showcasing talent, the Festival di Sanremo has a competitive element. Performers are split into two categories: famous singers and new 'proposals'. The songs that the contestants choose must never have been performed in public before, and the melody and lyrics must be entirely original. The week-long event also brings a whole host of presenters to the town. The most famous of them all are Pippo Baudo and Mike Bongiorno, who have presented the show over 20 times between them.

Such was the success of the Festival di Sanremo that in 1955 it was broadcast through the Eurovision Network, a European-wide telecommunications network owned by the European Broadcasting Union. The European Broadcasting Union met to discuss the possibility of a Europe-wide musical competition soon after. As with the Italian festival, it was agreed that this new competition would primarily be a radio show, although broadcasters were keen to use the opportunity as a technical experiment in live television broadcasting. The notion of televisions in the home, never mind live, transnational broadcast, was completely unthinkable at the time!

The 1955 Sanremo Festival was not the only song contest in Europe. RAI, Italy's biggest broadcast network, also hosted an International Song Festival in Venice. It included entries from Austria, Belgium, France, Italy, Monaco and the Netherlands that were submitted by their respective national radio services. Entries were voted on by national juries and the winner was awarded the Golden Gondola Prize.

Below: Jetty Paerl of the Netherlands was the first person ever to perform at Eurovision

Live from Lugano

The first Eurovision Song Contest, or as it was called, 'Grand Prix Eurovision de la Chanson Européenne' (Eurovision Grand Prize for European Song) took place in the Swiss resort of Lugano. Its central location in Europe provided the best odds for a successful transmission. The competition retained connections with its Italian roots, being hosted by Italian Lohengrin Filipello.

Seven countries participated in the first competition with two entries each: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and host country, Switzerland. Austria, Denmark and the United Kingdom

“THE EUROPEAN BROADCASTING UNION MET TO DISCUSS A EUROPE-WIDE MUSICAL COMPETITION”

Belgium’s Fud Leclerc sings ‘Ma petite chatte’ (My little darling) at the 1958 contest in Hilversum

© Getty Images, Alamy

Hosts Switzerland won the inaugural contest thanks to Lys Assia's 'Refrain'

narrowly missed out on their opportunity to participate when broadcasters failed to meet the deadline for entry.

Competition rules have changed greatly over the years. In 1956, solo musicians were accompanied by a 24-piece orchestra. Songs were not to exceed three and a half minutes and had to be sung in the performer's native tongue. Each participating country sent two jury members to the competition to vote secretly – so secretly, in fact, that the scores from the 1956 competition have never been made public.

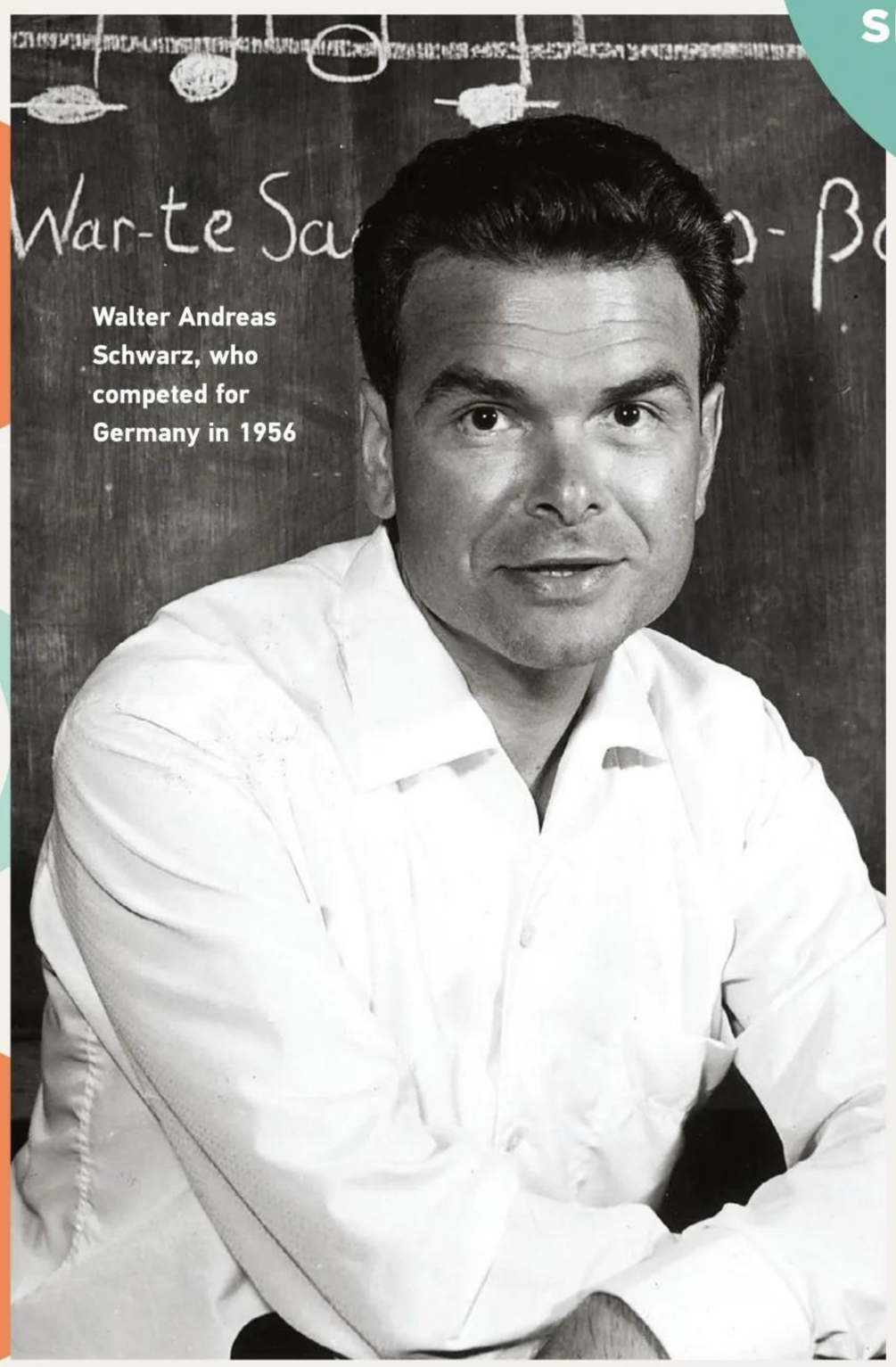
Interesting entries

Some of the original contestants have had a life-long relationship with the Eurovision Song Contest. Winner Lys Assia (Switzerland) performed in the 50th anniversary contest in 2005 and presented the trophy in 2009 to Alexander Rybak, the winner that year. Belgium's Fud Leclerc represented his country four times between 1956 and 1962. Several have continued in musical careers, including Mathé Altéry (France) and Franca Raimondi (Italy).

Although taking place 11 years after the end of World War II, tensions across Europe and subsequently within the competition still simmered. Jetty Paerl competed for the Netherlands in 1956. In 1940, she and her family had fled to London. From there she contributed to the radio programme Radio Oranje (created by the Dutch government-in-exile), singing songs that mocked the Nazis and National Socialism.

Walter Andreas Schwarz, who represented Germany in the first competition, was of Jewish origin. He began his career as an actor in 1939 but was soon persecuted under the Nuremberg Laws and prevented from working. He was deported to a labour camp in Lenne and later the Holzen concentration camp. His survival is attributed to one of the commanders being a childhood friend. In 1948, Schwarz moved to London and worked as a translator for the BBC. His performance at the 1956

"SONGS WERE NOT TO EXCEED THREE AND A HALF MINUTES AND HAD TO BE SUNG IN THE SINGER'S NATIVE TONGUE"



Walter Andreas Schwarz, who competed for Germany in 1956

Below: Eurovision continues to be grounds for political protest

competition was self-composed and the lyrics criticised Holocaust denial.

Corry Brokken was one of the competitions' most famous contestants. She competed in the first Eurovision Song Contest for the Netherlands (alongside Jetty Paerl) and won the second in 1957. After this success she became one of the most successful female singers in the Netherlands in the 1950s and '60s and even had her own TV show. She ended her music career in 1973 to study law.

Criticism

While most participating countries sent jury members to the competition, Luxembourg did not. The votes that would have been used by Luxembourg were purported to have been given to Switzerland, to vote on their behalf. As countries could vote for their own contestants, claims were made that this skewed the votes in favour of the winner, Switzerland's Lys Assia. However, as the voting system was never repeated and future jurors were prohibited from voting for their own country.

Other criticisms have also been thwarted by the loss of the original tapes. No copies survive of the original television tapes, with the exception of Lys Assia's winning performance. It is impossible, therefore, to know how the other singers ranked within the competition.

The only other contest for which there is no trace is the 1964 contest in Denmark. These records were destroyed in a fire at the Danish broadcast studios in the 1970s. This contest was highly politicised, with protesters claiming that countries with right-wing dictatorships, such as Spain, should not be permitted to take part.

Just a year after the contest began, the countries of the original contestant groups (with the exception of Switzerland) became bound in the European Economic Community, the beginning of the journey towards the European Union. The first Eurovision song contest thus became a forerunner; a cultural expression of a changing political world, opening up new music to be enjoyed across Europe.

Above: The Sanremo Music Festival, 1955

Left: Corry Brokken hosting the 1976 contest in The Hague

© Getty Images, Alamy

Eurovision 1959 presenter Jacqueline Joubert chats to Dutch entrant Teddy Scholten

"YOU CAN JUST IMAGINE FAMILIES GATHERED AROUND THEIR 12-INCH TV SCREEN"

FRANCOPHONES IN THE FIFTIES

The UK joined the Eurovision party in 1957 and voting changed forever, but which nations dominated the early events?

WORDS **JOEL McIVER**

If you haven't seen footage of the very early Eurovision Song Contests, head to YouTube and rectify that immediately. They're pure gold from start to finish, even though everything about those long-gone contests was several times less extravagant than today's equivalents.

The 1957 event is the earliest for which film survives: the debut Eurovision the year before is only available in audio sadly. Even though the fifties films – in glorious black and white, of course – are in the low resolution of the day, the celebratory atmosphere of these far-off events is unmistakable.

Another reason to indulge is the opportunity to look into the past and realise just how much times have changed, technologically and culturally. You can just imagine families gathered around their 12-inch TV screen, munching on bread and dripping and in the UK at least, marvelling at the outlandish customs of mainland Europe, then a genuinely different world thanks to its unsurpassable language barriers and mystifying sanitation...

1957: The year the rules changed

It's funny to think nowadays that the 1956 Eurovision featured just seven competing countries, and the whole show lasted just one hour – even including the voting and results. The expansion of the event in the direction of today's mega-production began immediately though, with several innovations to the rules and processes.

In 1957, Austria, Denmark and the UK signed up alongside the original magnificent seven, so there were now ten nations battling for victory. The event was held on 3 March 1957 – the earliest date in a given year of any Eurovision, trivia fans – at a music hall called the Großer Sendesaal des hessischen Rundfunks in Frankfurt in West Germany. A live audience of 400 people attended the show, a tiny number by today's standards, which was hosted by the German actress Anaid Iplicjian.

The new rules for the event, properly (and grandly) titled the Grand Prix Eurovision de la Chanson Européenne 1957, were as follows. First up, each country was only allowed to perform one song, with a maximum of two performers delivering it. Next, the voting system was upgraded: a country could field a jury of up to ten people, each of whom could allocate a vote to their preferred song. In addition, no one was allowed to vote for their own country, a radical move at the time but one that seems obvious all these years later.

There was some controversy when the Italian team performed a song that lasted five minutes and nine seconds even though the rules clearly stated a maximum duration per song of three and a half minutes. The UK's song by Patricia Bredin, titled 'All', lasted less than two minutes: clearly her aim was to get in and

The French singer André Claveau, who won the 1958 Eurovision, is seen here holding a prize-winning pooch called Duchess Minnie

© Getty Images, Alamy

1959 host Jacqueline Joubert points out the scores on the resolutely non-digital scoreboard, with France sitting at the top

out as soon as possible, which she duly did, scoring only seventh place. There was also a touch of sauciness when Denmark's Birthe Wilke and Gustav Winckler ended their performance with a passionate, 12-second kiss: radio audiences were out of luck there.

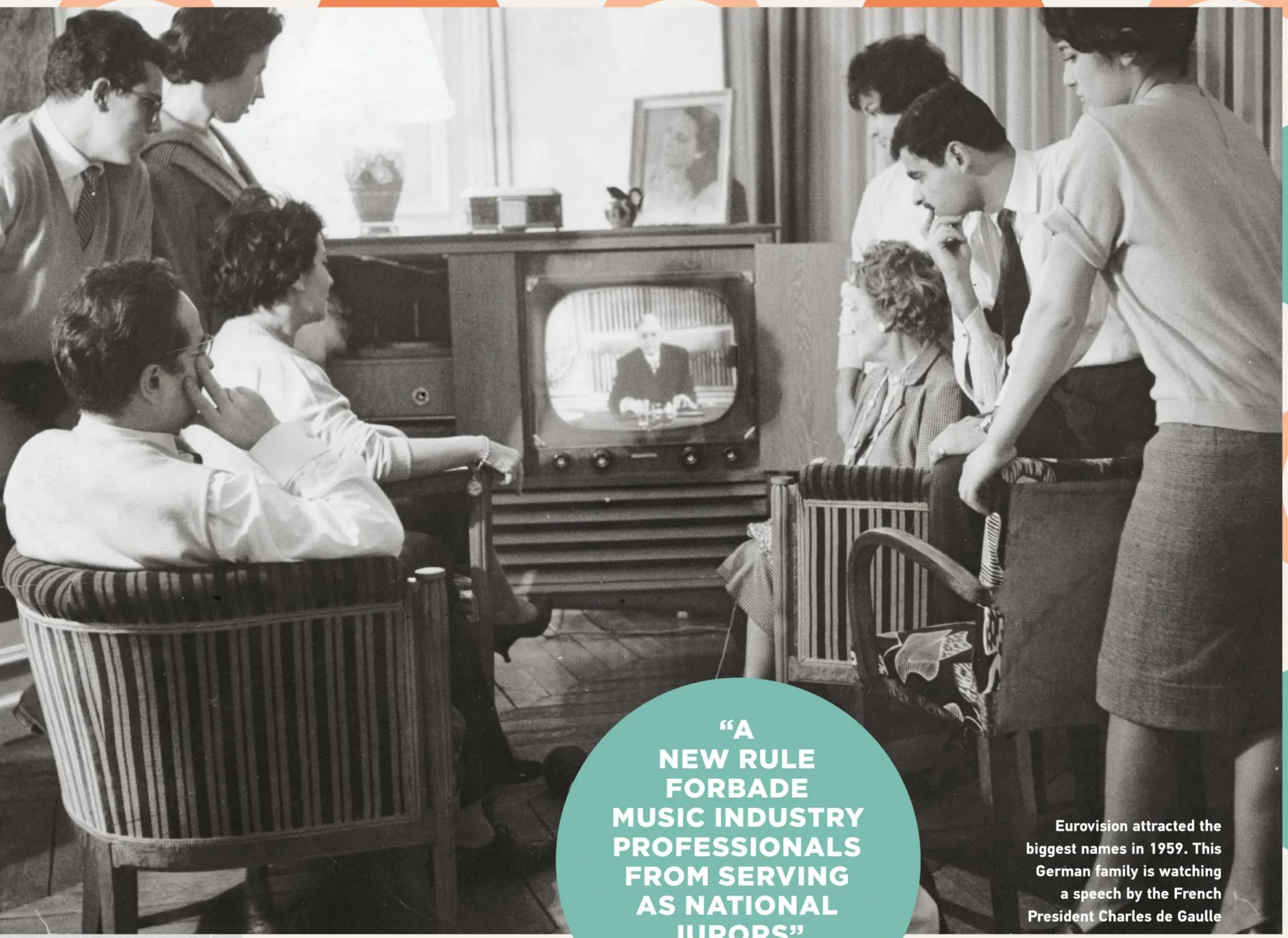
The winner was the Dutch singer Corry Brokken with the song 'Net als toen': Brokken had also competed in the '56 event, setting a precedent for multiple winners in later years. After the 1957 Eurovision, winning countries agreed to stage subsequent shows, making it truly 'Euro' for the first time.

1958: The year it all went 'blu'

The Eurovision Song Contest 1958 was held on 12 March at the AVRO Studios in Hilversum, a town near Amsterdam in the Netherlands, and hosted by a local television presenter with the curious name of Hannie Lips. As in '57, ten countries competed, with Sweden taking the place of the UK, which didn't bother to send anyone. That's hardly a winning attitude, now, is it?

The venue looked suitably Dutch, decorated with tulips from top to bottom, and boasted interchangeable backgrounds for each song as well as a large scoreboard.

From day one, Eurovision has included local colour – or at least, local black and white. Here's the show's roving camera crew filming a glacier pilot flying over the Swiss mountain of Cry d'Er in 1957



Eurovision attracted the biggest names in 1959. This German family is watching a speech by the French President Charles de Gaulle

“A NEW RULE FORBADE MUSIC INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS FROM SERVING AS NATIONAL JURORS”

The rules implemented the previous year remained unchanged, and this time the song duration limit of three minutes and 30 seconds was enforced.

A transmission malfunction meant that the opening song by Italy could not be seen by audiences or juries, so the performers ran through it again when the offending machinery was fixed. This was the second year that the voting was conducted live on television and radio, bringing audiences and juries a step closer together and leading enthralled watchers to chorus ‘Nul points!’ across the continent.

The winner was France, whose singer André Claveau did a convincing job with ‘Dors, mon amour’, but the real victory went to Italy, whose song ‘Nel blu, dipinto di blu’ by Domenico Modugno was a huge, Grammy-winning hit afterwards. You probably know it better as ‘Volare’, the first word of its chorus, and from the many cover versions by Dean Martin, the Gipsy Kings and other artists.

Farewell to the fifties

Whatever you say about Eurovision, talking about it is a learning experience. You can just call it “Eurovision ’59 in Cannes”, or you could say “the Grand Prix Eurovision de la Chanson Européenne 1959 at the Palais des Festivals et des Congrès in Cannes, organised by the European Broadcasting Union and the broadcaster Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française” and get a free French vocabulary lesson.

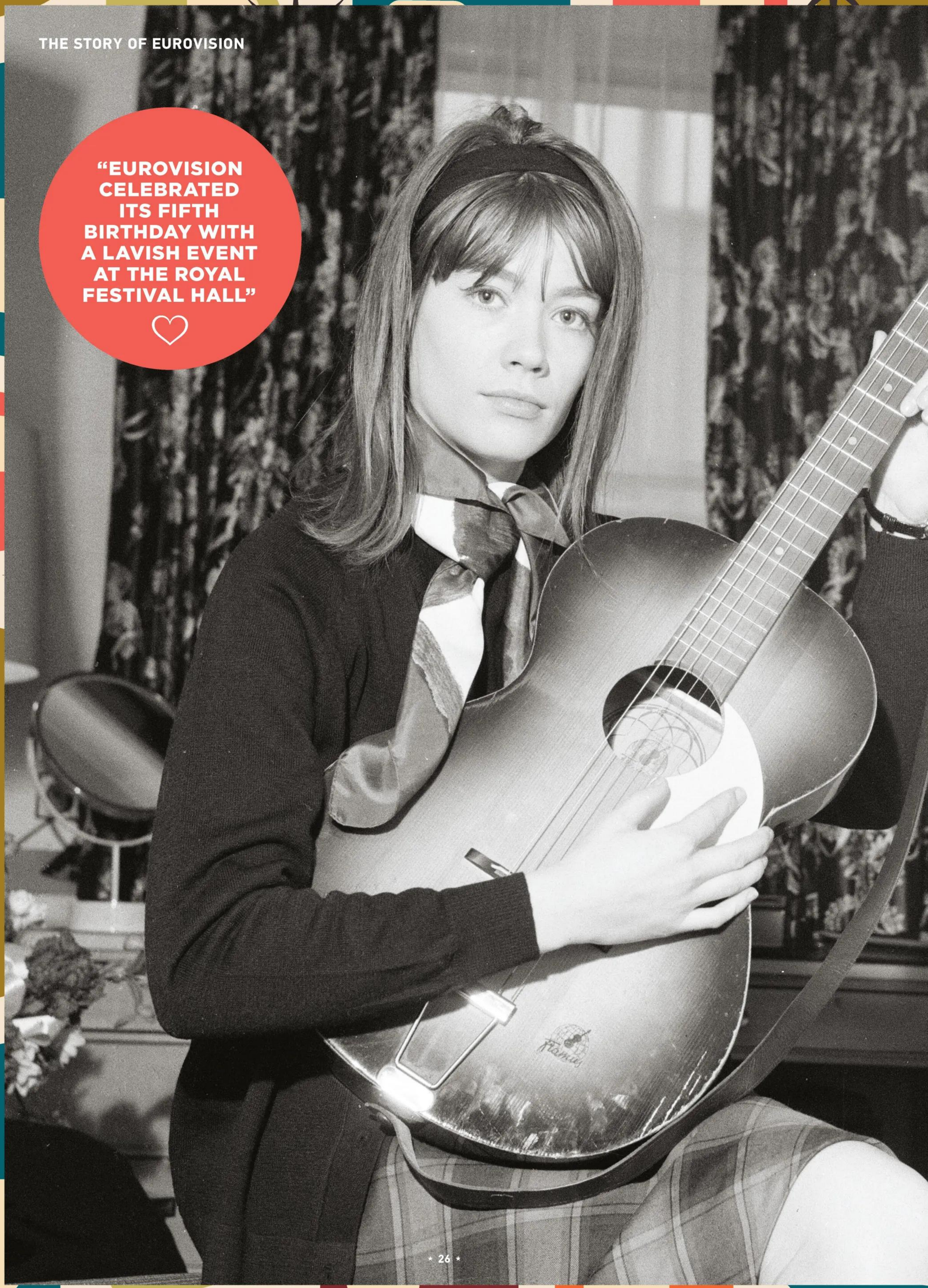
The fourth annual event, however you refer to it, was held on 11 March 1959 in France and hosted by TV presenter Jacqueline Joubert. The UK returned to compete, and Monaco came on board while Luxembourg did not, so a total of 11 nations were now involved. This time the setting was a grand one, with three revolving platforms, each divided into four, used for the show. Decorative items associated with each competing country were added to the sets, giving the event a more dedicated feel: this was Europe represented in tasteful miniature.

A new rule forbade music industry professionals from serving as national jurors, a slightly odd decision in retrospect but presumably enforced in order to retain the event’s inclusive, people-first feel. In addition, the songs that came second and third were played twice alongside the winning replay, the only time that this has ever happened at Eurovision.

But who won? It was the Dutch, with Teddy Scholten’s ‘Een beetje’, making the Netherlands the first country to win more than once. The UK came close to victory, coming second with Pearl Carr and Teddy Johnson’s ‘Sing, Little Birdie’. With hindsight, we know that the UK’s time was yet to come. Roll on, the Swinging Sixties!

© Getty Images

"EUROVISION CELEBRATED ITS FIFTH BIRTHDAY WITH A LAVISH EVENT AT THE ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL"



THE SOON-TO-BE-SWINGING SIXTIES

The annual Eurovision contests between 1960 and 1966 saw the show gain ground – just in time for the big surprise of '67...

WORDS **JOEL McIVER**

There wasn't a single moment when the grey fifties suddenly transitioned into the psychedelic sixties, in terms of Eurovision or any other measure. The first few years of the sixties were effectively an interim period between the decades, with world economies slowly beginning to get over their post-World War II hangover, new technology starting to make everyday life easier, and the Western world undergoing a newly liberal phase led by a brand-new demographic: teenagers. So how was all this good stuff reflected in our favourite yearly music fest?

1960: The UK hosts for the first time

Eurovision celebrated its fifth birthday with a lavish event at the Royal Festival Hall in London after Dutch broadcaster NTS passed on the opportunity to host for the second time in three years. Thirteen countries took part and 14 watched on TV, with Luxembourg returning after a hiatus and the first entry arriving from Norway.

Held on 25 March, the event was hosted for the first time by the presenter Katie Boyle, and the audience witnessed a victory from France's Jacqueline Boyer, whose song 'Tom Pillibi' pushed the hosting nation into second place. So close, and yet so far for the UK.

Francoise Hardy, a French teenager, represented Monaco in 1963. She went on to become a renowned cultural icon of the decade

1961: The year of the movie star

It seemed like the UK was destined to always be the silver medallist at Eurovision, a sense that was reaffirmed when the UK came second in 1961, although in fairness the event was won by a well-known film actor, Jean-Claud Pascal, a Luxembourger who reminded everyone of his small country's enhanced status in this environment. His song was a standard love ballad called 'Nous les amoureux':

© Getty Images

fortunately, audience members who preferred more raucous music didn't have many more years to wait.

This time, the event was held on 18 March at the Palais des Festivals in Cannes, France, the venue also having hosted the 1959 Eurovision. Finland, Spain and Yugoslavia debuted as entrants, so viewers now had 16 countries to entertain them, meaning that Eurovision was no longer one in a line of TV shows on a given evening: it demanded its own 'Eurovision night'.

Who turned out the lights in 1962?

The Francophone nations' reputation as reliable Eurovision winners was already established at this point in the show's history, and the '62 event reinforced the idea. This year, France took the trophy home for the third time in three years thanks to its entrant Isabelle Aubret stealing the show with 'Un premier amour'. The largely French-speaking setting of the Grand Auditorium de RTL, Villa Louvigny in Luxembourg City may or may not have helped – we couldn't possibly speculate...

A brand-new voting system was implemented this year: each competing nation now awarded three, two and one point or points to the top three songs after they were revealed after combining all the jury votes. The new system went off without a hitch, although the same could not be said of the power supply to the venue. As soon as Aubret left the stage the screens went dark, both at the venue and on TV sets around the world. It has been speculated that the Dutch score was negatively affected by this, but sadly we can neither confirm nor deny that.

1963: A night of controversy

It seemed appropriate for Eurovision to return to the UK in the first year of Beatlemania, even if it didn't come close to winning. Held at the new BBC Television Centre in London, the '63 instalment pulled in 75 million viewers from 17 countries, who witnessed a close match between Denmark and Switzerland. Another new modification to the voting system – with countries now awarding between one and five points to their favourite songs – meant that Grethe and Jørgen Ingmann claimed Denmark's first victory with 'Dansevise'.

However, the 1963 Eurovision is more usually remembered for another reason – the controversy around the Norwegian vote. When it came time for Norway to

"FRANCE TOOK THE TROPHY HOME THANKS TO ISABELLE AUBRET STEALING THE SHOW"

The Austrian singer Eleonore Schwarz in full voice at the Eurovision Song Contest 1962 in Luxembourg

France Gall presents 1966 winner Udo Jürgens of Austria with his winner's medal

German actress and singer Heidi Brühl at BBC TV Centre in London, pictured during rehearsals for the 1963 event. Her song 'Marcel' finished ninth

deliver its scores, someone in Oslo had evidently misread the rules and the votes were delivered in the wrong format. These things happen on live TV, so the UK host Katie Boyle agreed that Norway could come back and give their votes in the correct format later in the event. However, when the Norwegians came on screen a second time their votes had changed in the interim, affecting the outcome and magically giving the victory to Norway's neighbours Denmark. Coincidence, you say? Hmm...

Protesting in '64

The 1964 Eurovision went ahead at the Tivoli Concert Hall in Copenhagen, Denmark, despite complaints about the fluffed voting the previous year. For the first time in the event's nine-year history politics intruded on the action, firstly when the Swedish team was obliged to pull out because of industrial action by their domestic Musicians' Union. Portugal debuted that year, so the number of competing countries remained at 16.

More significantly, an unknown protester interrupted the proceedings – not the last time that this would happen, of course. Although there's no footage of the incident – as indeed there is none of the entire event, the film having subsequently vanished – an audio recording has survived.

The protester, who ran onto the stage holding a banner that read 'Boycott Franco and Salazar', was attempting to raise awareness of the right-wing dictatorships of Spain and Portugal,

© Getty Images

The 1963 contestants, from Heidi Brühl of Germany (far left) to Esther Ofarim of Switzerland (far right). Can you spot the soon-to-be-famous Nana Mouskouri of Luxembourg? (Clue: glasses)

particularly as both countries were competing. Both dictatorships lasted another decade or so: it would be nice to think Eurovision helped their fall in some small way.

Oh, and Italy won for the first time thanks to Gigliola Cinquetti's landslide victory with the song 'Non ho l'età'.

1965: No ballads, s'il vous plaît

A decade into the Song Contest, things were hotting up in several different ways, with up to 18 countries now taking part, with the future Euro-dominators Ireland signing on and Sweden returning. The Eastern Europe Intervision network was now broadcasting Eurovision, which meant that the TV audience swelled to an estimated 150 million viewers with the addition of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary and East Germany.

The 1965 event was held on 20 March at the Sala di Concerto della RAI in Naples, Italy, and remains among the most lavish shows by the standards of the newly

The 1961 UK entry, Mark Wynter, rehearsing his song 'Dream Girl' at BBC Television Centre in Shepherd's Bush, London

"THE TV AUDIENCE SWELLED TO AN ESTIMATED 150 MILLION VIEWERS"

Singer Kathy Kirby, the British entry in the Eurovision Song Contest, pictured in January 1965

psychedelic era. As was rapidly becoming the norm, arguments raged about a point of protocol. The rows revolved around the entry from Sweden, which was sung in English rather than the team's native language. Legal eagles revealed that no rule existed concerning the language in which a song might be delivered, and the controversy died down in time for Luxembourg to win.

Their singer, France Gall, was actually French, but no one complained about that. Fortunately for more jaded Eurovision viewers, Gall's song 'Poupée de cire, poupée de son' was much more upbeat than the usual sugary ballads, bringing the contest in line with modern fashions.

Steps towards diversity in 1966

Before the '66 event Eurovision head honchos invited international broadcasters to suggest ways in which the rapidly expanding contest might be improved. Some of the incoming ideas were impractical, such as the idea that competing countries should be split according to their internal languages, but the better ideas were incorporated into the 5 March 1966 event, held once again at the Grand Auditorium de RTL in Luxembourg City. One of the innovations was that music experts should be included in the voting juries, the idea being that the songs' quality, or lack thereof, would be addressed professionally. Did the stratagem succeed? You tell us.

The 1966 Eurovision was notable for the inclusion of the contest's first Black singer, the Dutch artist Milly Scott, although the victory ultimately went to Austria's Udo Jürgens on his third appearance at the contest. His song, 'Merci, Cherie', was evidence that no consensus had been reached on which languages could and should be used by varying nationalities.

In retrospect, an Austrian singing in French to an audience in Luxembourg is the essence of being European, and all the more welcome for that.

© Getty Images

RULE BRITANNIA!

By 1967 it was the UK's turn to step into the limelight, but that didn't mean it was all going to be plain sailing...

WORDS **JOEL McIVER**

If you view Eurovision in British terms, then 1967 is Year Zero. The event had been held in the UK before that year, and the country had come close to victory on more than one occasion. But it had never actually won, despite its well-earned reputation as the world's leading nation for original pop and rock music. The US was arguably its only rival in that sense, but with over four times the UK's population, it was a Goliath compared to the David across the pond. The UK was the little island that could, or rather couldn't. And then along came Sandie Shaw...

1967: A Shaw thing

Sandra Goodrich, as no one refers to her, was born in Essex in 1947 and was spotted as a teenager by the pop star Adam Faith. A contract with the Pye label followed and she scored big in 1964 with a version of Bacharach & David's '(There's) Always Something There To Remind Me'. More single and album hits followed, and Shaw soon became a fixture on British TV shows such as *Top of the Pops*, *Ready Steady Go!* and *Thank Your Lucky Stars*.

By '67 the times they were a-changing, and Shaw was in danger of losing momentum: in need of a good-sized hit, she accepted an offer by the BBC to represent the UK at that year's Eurovision in Vienna. Although she was concerned that the move would have a negative impact on her artistic credibility, she signed up, performing five songs on Rolf Harris' TV show. The public duly voted for 'Puppet on a String', a song by Bill Martin and Phil Coulter.

"THE UK HAD NEVER WON, DESPITE ITS REPUTATION AS THE WORLD'S LEADING NATION FOR POP AND ROCK"

Raindrops keep falling on his head: Cliff Richard pictured in 1967, a year ahead of his near triumph at Eurovision

Sandie Shaw enjoying the moment. She delivered the show-stopping song 'Puppet on a String' and became a huge star

© Getty Images

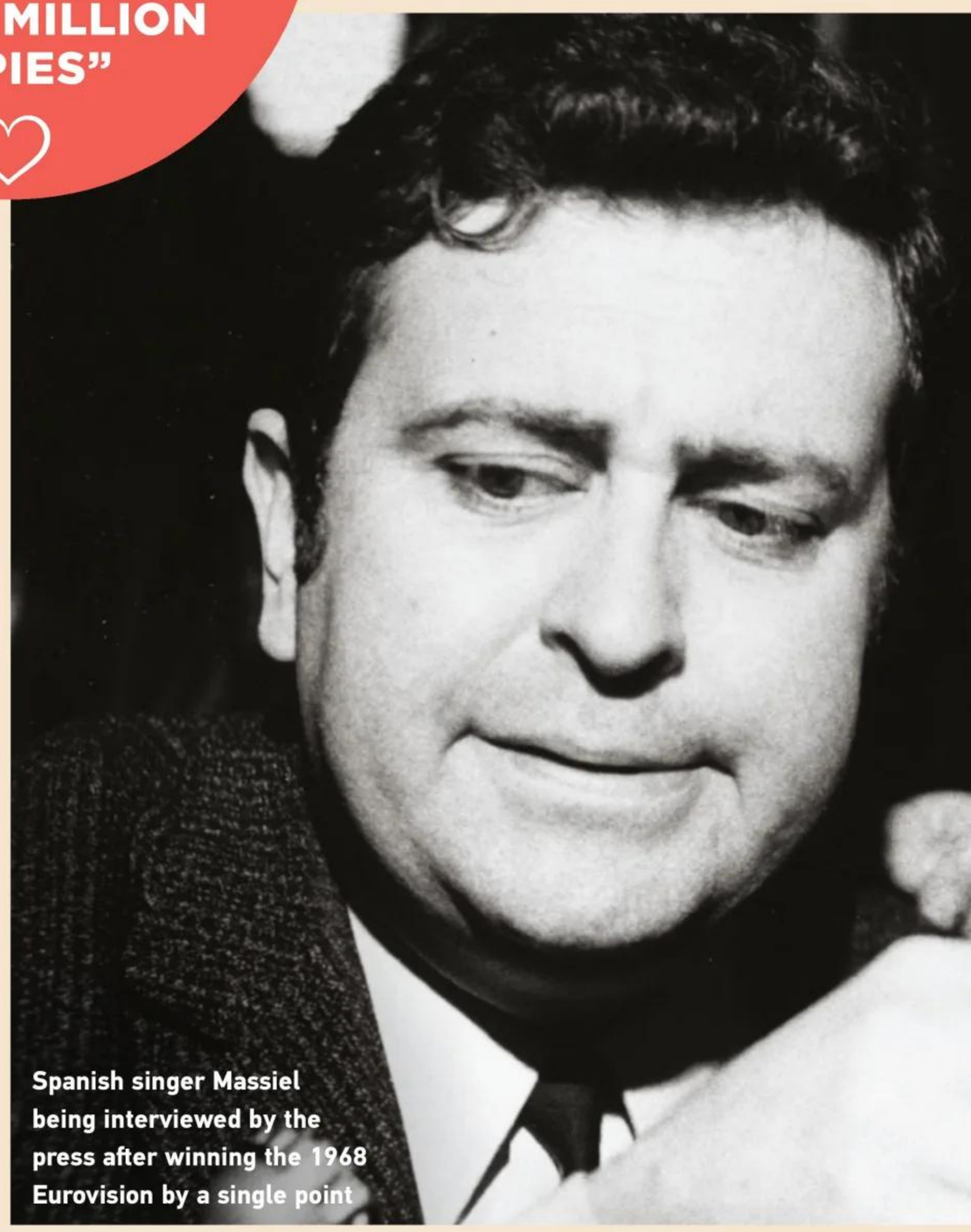
Clodagh Rogers, the British entry for the 1971 Eurovision Song Contest, pictured on 16 September 1969

Shaw herself didn't like 'Puppet on a String' one bit. "I hated it... I was instinctively repelled by its sexist drivel and cuckoo-clock tune," she later said. Regardless, it was a mammoth success, obliterating the competition at the '67 Eurovision and making her the UK's first winner. She also scored a Number One single in the UK with it: as her third chart-topper, that made her a record-breaker too. Not only that, the song was a hit around the world, earning Shaw a gold disc in the UK and becoming the biggest seller of the year in Germany. Eventually it shifted a gobsmacking 4 million copies, making it the biggest-selling single by a British female artist of all time (depending on your source).

There were other facets that made that year's contest memorable: one was the presence of Rolf Harris as the UK compere, four decades before his reputation was permanently tarnished. More positively, Portugal was represented by Eduardo Nascimento, the first Black male singer in the history of the contest.

Over and above those factoids, the bigger picture was that Eurovision could no longer be regarded as a quirky or niche event after 1967: as the success of 'Puppet on a String' demonstrated, the brand had potentially immense selling power. For that reason, the commercial side and scope of Eurovision increased steadily from then on.

"THE SONG WAS A HIT AROUND THE WORLD, EARNING SHAW A GOLD DISC. EVENTUALLY IT SOLD 4 MILLION COPIES"



Spanish singer Massiel being interviewed by the press after winning the 1968 Eurovision by a single point

Congratulate in ’68

No, it wasn’t those late-sixties countercultural drugs kicking in – Eurovision 1968 really was broadcast in full colour, allowing the extravagant fashions of the day to burst from viewers’ TV screens like a psychedelic rainbow. Hosted by the BBC at London’s Royal Albert Hall on 6 April, the thirteenth Eurovision saw 17 countries step up to sing – but in true imperial spirit, the UK knew all along who was going to win.

The sure victor was thought to be Cliff Richard, of course, then at the peak of his powers, although arguably he remained at that suspiciously youthful-looking peak for another 40 years or so. An early demo of his song, the genuinely awesome ‘Congratulations’, featured guitar playing by the then-jobbing musicians John Paul Jones and Jimmy Page, four years before they took over the world with a band called Led Zeppelin. So good was the song, and so positive its public response, that bookmakers had Cliff odds-on to take first place with ease.

To his and everyone else’s abject shock, ‘Congratulations’ came second by a single point to Spain, whose singer María de los Ángeles Felisa Santamaría Espinosa, conveniently nicknamed Massiel, stole the crown with the very emotional – and also very Eurovision-titled – ‘La La La’. The song was originally tipped to be sung by another singer, Joan Manuel Serrat, who wanted to perform it in the Catalan language: as this was a politically sensitive issue, Serrat was coincidentally ‘retired’ just

Above: She’d better shout! It’s Lulu, who came joint first at the 1969 Eurovision Song Contest with the song ‘Boom Bang-A-Bang’

before the show and replaced by Massiel. When she sang the reprise of the track at the show’s end, she did so in English, the first time a Eurovision song had been performed in two languages.

Rumours (subsequently discredited) soon circulated that Spain’s General Franco had bribed the judges so that his country could host the 1969 event. These make for a great story, but the reality is that the right-wing dictator, who was a little conservative in much the same way that the surface of the sun is a little warm, probably had bigger things on his mind.

The sixties end with a bang-a-bang

Sixteen Eurovision teams headed to Spain in 1969, with the event held on 29 March at the Teatro Real in Madrid: Austria was notably absent as a protest over the Franco regime. The host, television presenter and actress Laurita Valenzuela, did an effervescent job of introducing the singers. Admirably, she kept her cool when the voting led to a tie – not merely between two countries but an unprecedented four: the United Kingdom with ‘Boom Bang-A-Bang’ by the pop sensation Lulu; Spain with ‘Vivo cantando’ by Salomé; the Netherlands with ‘De troubadour’ by Lenny Kuhr; and France with ‘Un jour, un enfant’ by Frida Boccara.

The rules didn’t specify what to do in the event of a tie, so the 1968 winner Massiel simply handed the trophy to each of the four winners in turn. It was a surreal outcome, which was appropriate because the publicity materials for the ’69 event were designed by none other than the king of surrealism, Salvador Dalí.

Another splendidly irregular facet of that year’s event was that Wales, the home of some of the world’s most accomplished singers, was rejected from taking part as a new entrant because the country was not a sovereign state. You literally could not make this stuff up.

© Getty Images

Clodagh Rodgers attracted the ire of the IRA for performing for the UK

"SHE LATER CLAIMED TO HAVE RECEIVED DEATH THREATS FROM THE IRA, WHO REGARDED HER AS A TRAITOR"

TROUBLED TIMES FOR EUROVISION

It wasn't always sunshine in the seventies – especially when the shadow of terrorism threatened to spoil the fun...

WORDS **JOEL McIVER**

Eurovision fans worldwide know that the annual event isn't only about song and dance: it's also a microcosm of political alliances and tensions, within Europe but also from further afield. This isn't the case every year, of course, but when international relations (or lack of them) intrude on the festivities, as they did in the early seventies, Eurovision becomes a mirror for our times. Unfortunately, the image it reflects isn't always a comforting one.

1970: Irish eyes were smiling

The fifteenth edition of the Eurovision Song Contest was held on 21 March 1970 at the RAI Congrescentrum in Amsterdam, Netherlands, with Dutch television presenter Willy Dobbe doing the honours. As four winners had shared victory in 1969, there was some discussion over which country should host the event as the new decade began: the UK and Spain had handled Eurovision in 1968 and '69, so the toss of a coin between France and the Netherlands went to the latter.

A further implication of the four-way win was that Finland, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and Austria refused to take part in the 1970 event, all of them in a huff because they felt marginalised in favour of the larger European countries. You may laugh, but wars literally started for this reason a few centuries ago. In any case, the smaller field of 12 competing countries allowed Ireland's 18-year-old singer Dana Scallon to romp to victory with the excellent 'All Kinds of Everything'. Her unexpected triumph was a small relief for a nation scarred by the first two years of what would come to be known as The Troubles, a 30-year period of unrest that would claim over 50,000 casualties, including 3,532 deaths, 1,840 of them civilian fatalities.

The reduced performances roster also obliged the producers to pad out the show with video 'postcards' from each nation, an innovation that continues to this day. Other legacies of the 1970 edition were evident in Dana's later political career and also in the impact of Spain's Julio Iglesias, an unknown back then but soon to become a massive star.

New votes and new rules in 1971

Broadcast from Dublin, Ireland, as the Troubles raged, Eurovision '71 was always going to be a tense affair. It was held at the city's Gaiety Theatre on 3 April with presenter Bernadette Ní Ghallchóir taking the stage. Eighteen countries returned, the previous absentees having evidently stopped sulking.

This time out, up to six performers were permitted per team, making the performances more dynamic and the scale of the event bigger all round. Another, more opaque innovation was that each voting country sent two jury members, respectively aged over and under 25, with at least ten years' gap between their ages. These would award between one and five points to each entry, which sounded reasonable – until someone noticed that certain countries didn't award more than a couple of points, skewing the overall scores somewhat.

The BBC, concerned about exacerbating the existing tensions between Eire and Northern Ireland, chose the Northern Irish singer Clodagh Rodgers – who had fans on both sides of the border – to represent the UK. Although her performance went smoothly, she later claimed to have received death threats from the IRA, who regarded her as a traitor for representing the occupying regime.

© Getty Images

It's Luxembourg's round: Greek singer Vicky Leandros celebrates her 1972 win in Edinburgh with a pint

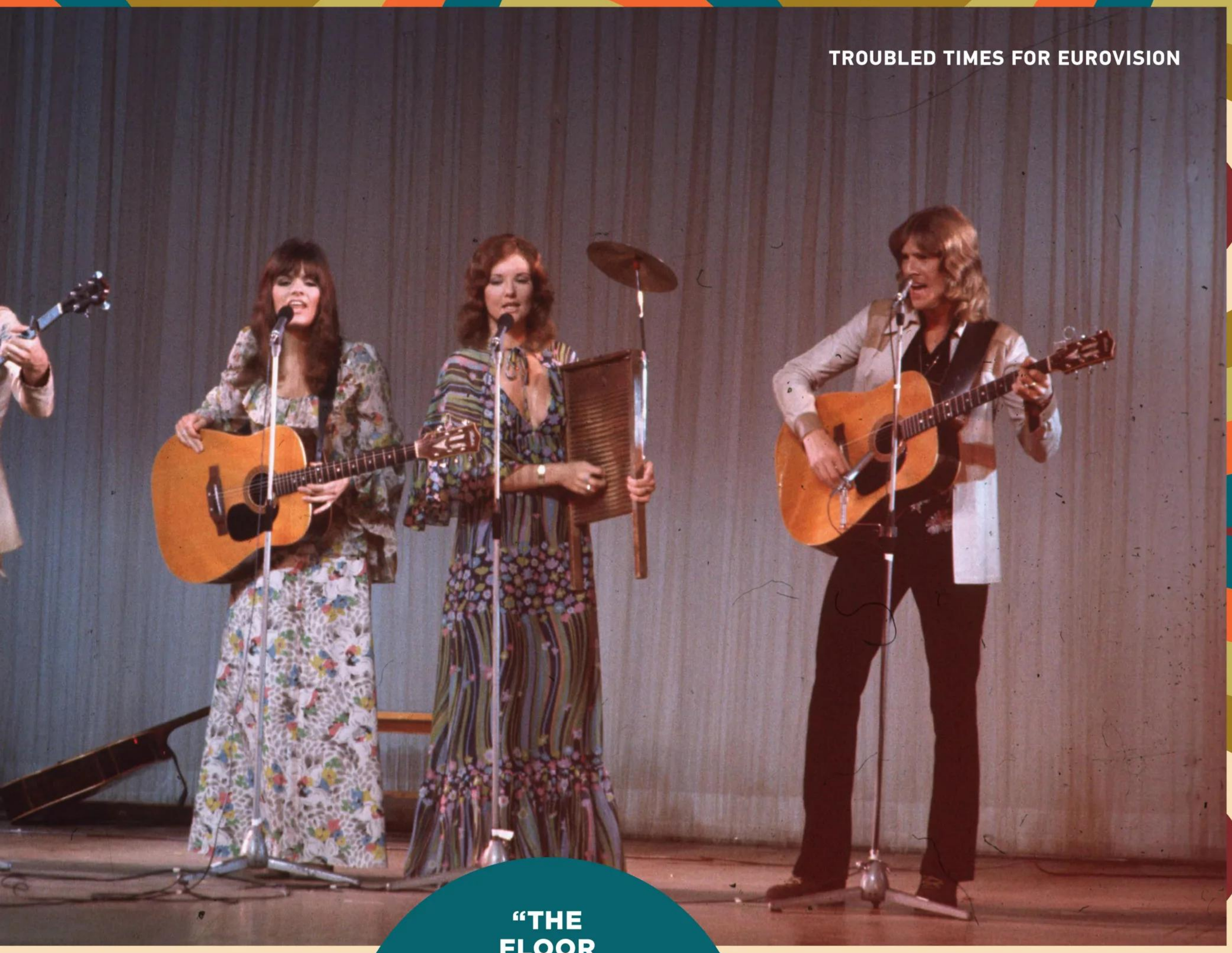
Dutch singers Sandra Reemer and Andres Holten perform their song 'Als het om de liefde gaat' in 1972

Monaco won the event, demonstrating that small countries had as much of a chance of victory as the big players, with Séverine's song 'Un banc, un arbre, une rue'. Controversy followed, with critics noting that the winning song was performed by a French artist, resident in France, delivered in the French language, conducted by a Frenchman and written by French composers.

Scotch excellence in '72

Eighteen competing countries landed in Edinburgh, Scotland, on 25 March 1972, after Monaco was unable to host that year's event and the ever-gallant BBC stepped up. Scottish ballet dancer Moira Shearer led the festivities, livened up between performances by an interval act performed on the Esplanade of the Great Hall of Edinburgh Castle, where the jurors were located. Before each performance the names of the singers were projected onto a screen laden with very of-the-era spiral effects.

Luxembourg won that year's relatively uneventful contest thanks to Vicky Leandros' eminently hummable 'Après toi', written by the singer's father Leo Leandros. The song actually gained a mere 8.3 percent of the total votes, making Eurovision '72 one of the most close-run events in its history. An interesting side note is that the song's lyrics



“THE FLOOR MANAGER ASKED THE AUDIENCE TO REMAIN SEATED IN CASE A SECURITY GUARD OPENED FIRE ON ANYONE WHO STOOD UP”

had been written by Yves Dessca, who also wrote the words for the 1971 winner ‘Un banc, un arbre, une rue’. This made Dessca the second person to win the contest twice, the first to win for two different nations, and also the first to win in two adjacent years.

1973: A dark time for Eurovision

On 7 April 1973, the Grand Théâtre in Luxembourg City resounded to songs by 17 nations. Austria and Malta took a year out, and Israel made its debut with the singer Ilanit (real name Hanna Dresner-Tzakh). While on tour in Europe the previous year, Ilanit and her singing partner Ilan had been asked to represent Germany. However, when the two realised that Israel was eligible to enter the competition through its membership of the European Broadcasting Union they opted to sing for their mother country, coming a respectable fourth.

None of this would have been a problem had it not been for the events of the previous year’s Summer Olympics in Munich, Germany, where 11 Israeli athletes and team-members were murdered by Palestinian terrorists. The event shocked the public around the world, and the organisers of Eurovision ’73 took no chances, organising tight security at the event. The UK’s commentator Terry Wogan later recalled that the floor manager asked the audience to remain seated throughout the evening in case a security guard opened fire on anyone who stood up.

In this congenial atmosphere, made slightly more accessible by the decision to allow songs to be sung in non-native languages for the first time, Luxembourg won for the second year in a row. Their song ‘Tu te reconnaîtras’, sung by Anne-Marie David, finished just two points ahead of Spain, while ‘Power to All Our Friends’ by the UK’s Cliff Richard, ended the night another two points behind. The result was a close call in an already tension-packed atmosphere. Fortunately, there were no reported security problems and everyone lived to sing another day.

The renowned folk-rock act the New Seekers were chosen to represent the UK in 1972

© Getty Images

THE WINNER TAKES IT ALL

One night in April 1974, a fateful performance of ‘Waterloo’ turned a Scandi pop curio into a global sensation. This is the story of ABBA’s lift-off...

WORDS **HENRY YATES**

Celebrating
50 YEARS OF ABBA'S 'WATERLOO'

Image: Getty Images

1974

"THERE WAS UPROAR IN THE PAPERS"

BJÖRN ON 'RING RING' COMING SECOND

For almost half a century, the history books on the shelf have preserved ABBA in aspic as the poster children of the Eurovision Song Contest. At the event's 50th anniversary in 2005, the Swedish band's winning entry of 1974 – 'Waterloo' – was crowned the greatest song of them all. Fast-forward to 2020 and a major BBC viewers poll once again propelled the anthem to the top spot. At 2021's singing competition in Rotterdam, a 14-country open vote put the consensus beyond all doubt. 'Waterloo' is, quite simply, the one. What else?

What fewer people know is that ABBA's first brushes with the continent's flagship music contest were bruising failures. As early as 1969, while still toiling as backroom songwriters for hire, Björn Ulvaeus and Benny Andersson had submitted their cabaret-style singalong, 'Ljuva Sextital', only to see it stall at the Melodifestivalen national heat stages.

That same year, Anni-Frid Lyngstad performed 'Härlig är Vår Jord' (Glorious Is Our Earth) and earned a humble fourth place for her troubles.

"It makes me realise why and how music sometimes becomes consumer goods," she reflected during an interview on Swedish Radio back in 2004. "But it was an exciting and incredibly nervous experience."

Undeterred, in 1972, Björn and Benny hunkered down with three other songwriters (Stig Anderson, Wayne Bickerton and Tony Waddington) to gift Swedish singer Lena Andersson with the wistful 'Säj Det Med En Sang' (Better To Have Loved). The bitter-sweet trill and rousing orchestration was a signpost to the genius that lay ahead, but once again the song failed to advance beyond the Swedish borders.

Even when the ABBA lineup fronted their own first entry in 1973, Björn, Benny, Anni-Frid and Agnetha Fältskog fared little better, with future classic 'Ring Ring' suffering the humiliation of limping in as runner-up to Nova & The Dolls' eminently forgettable offering 'Sommaren Som Aldrig Säger Nej'.

"The straight translation into English would be Your Breasts Are Like Nesting Swallows," sighed a despairing Björn in a *Billboard* interview years later. "There was an uproar in the papers from people writing in, 'How could you choose the wrong song?' It was so evident, and 'Ring Ring' became a huge hit and the other one just a minor hit. But we [still] had tremendous self-confidence because of the huge hit we had with 'Ring Ring' all over Scandinavia and Holland and Belgium. We weren't discouraged, because we knew they were going to change the jury system."

"We were much more glam rock in '73 – we were all sequins, all four of us," Benny reflected in 2008. He added sniffily, "We didn't win because they had this jury that consisted of music people. Journalists. Experts."

Even then, smarting from rejection, the Swedes still recognised that the Eurovision Song Contest – beamed to millions of households across the continent and not yet the tongue-in-cheek kitsch-fest it would later become – was the shop window they needed to escape the domestic market and make ABBA a full-time project.

EXPRESSEN

Söndagen den 7 april 1974

VILKEN FEST

- och en sån natt!

ALLT OM GLÄDJETÅRARNA PENGARNA OCH CHAMPAGNEN

- Bilder - ABBA i färg -

Swedish newspaper *Expressen* announces ABBA's win with the headline "What a party!"

"That was the dream from early on," Björn told *Mojo*'s Jim Irvin in 1999. "We had a hit in Japan in about 1972 with 'People Move On': that was the first taste of what it could be. But it was difficult to get people in England and America to listen to a group from Sweden, virtually impossible."

Conceptually, too, Eurovision was the perfect fit, with Björn telling the *Guardian* "ABBA was a European idea. We took inspiration from French chansons, German schlager, Italian ballads and Nordic folk."

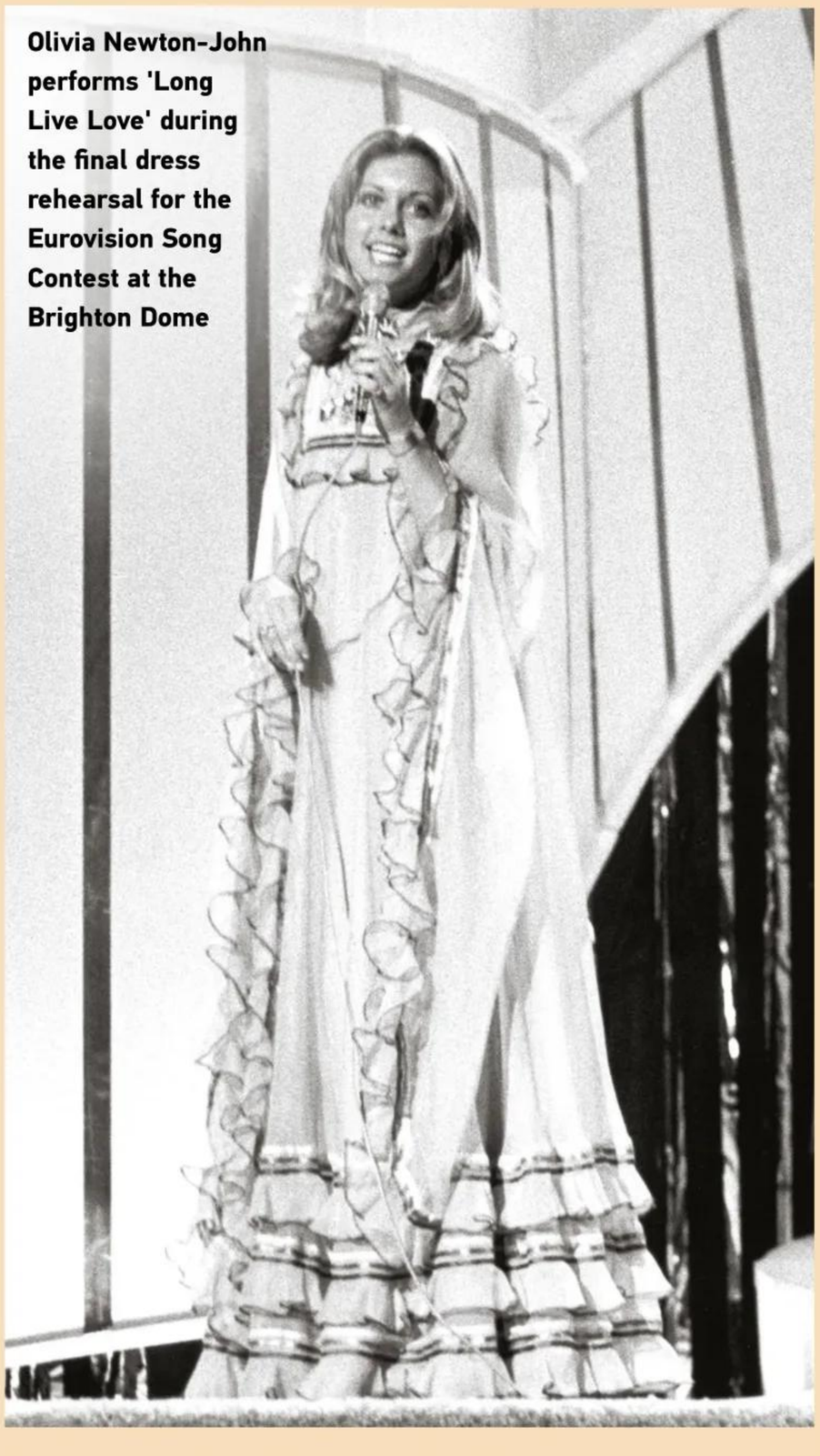
And so, at the tail-end of 1973, ABBA dusted themselves down, rallied and readied a new song for the following year's Melodifestivalen. But events could have played out very differently. Until late in the process, the band had pegged the lesser-known 'Hasta Mañana' – sung solo by Agnetha – as their best hope. "Which is a good song," reflected Andersson in the Netflix documentary *This Is Pop*. "But we said, 'No, we should have something that would represent what we want to do', not necessarily adjust to what they might like at the Eurovision, which is more of a European traditional schlager."

As Björn has since reflected, "'Hasta Mañana' would never have won and all this would never have happened." Better, he considered, to submit a "riskier" song that was "much more fun to perform".

That song could only be 'Waterloo'. Penned, as ever, by Björn and Benny, it was an instant classic built on pounding piano and call-and-response vocals that once again owed a palpable debt to glam-rock (and especially the 1973 Wizzard tune 'See My Baby Jive').

ABBA at the 1974 Eurovision Song Contest, which was held in Brighton, England

Images: Getty Images, Alamy



Olivia Newton-John performs 'Long Live Love' during the final dress rehearsal for the Eurovision Song Contest at the Brighton Dome

Taking in the sights of Brighton

'Waterloo's multiple overdubs were inspired by producer Phil Spector's epic 'wall of sound' approach, while the lyric (originally sung in Swedish by Agnetha and Anni-Frid) drew unlikely parallels between a woman surrendering to a man's advances and the 1815 routing of Napoleon Bonaparte's armies by the British-led Seventh Coalition. "Stig rightly suggested that the song should have an international theme," Björn told the British journalist Pete Paphides, "so we all came up with Waterloo." Not that ABBA were referencing the famous clash. "Waterloo is a pop song about someone meeting their own Waterloo," the band would later clarify. "It is not about the battle."

Whatever the 'Waterloo' lyric's motivations, it has since been held up as ABBA's wordsmanship at its sharpest. "'Waterloo' on first hearing can easily be written off as typical Abbian popsy-wopsian hokum," wrote journalist Joe Queenan in the *Guardian*'s 'Vinyl Word' series. "But a closer examination of the lyrics reveals the band's astonishingly deft insights into the nuances of 19th-century European geopolitics and also demonstrates the quartet's remarkable ability to re-contextualise the lessons of that dark period for our own times."

"'WATERLOO' IS A POP SONG ABOUT SOMEONE MEETING THEIR OWN WATERLOO. IT IS NOT ABOUT THE BATTLE"

Even with its history of backing the wrong horse, the 1974 Melodifestivalen could not fail to see 'Waterloo' for the stone-cold pop classic it would soon become. On 9 February, ABBA's new song was put before the Swedish public for consideration and stole an almost unanimous victory to be nodded through as the national entry. And so to Eurovision.

With back-to-back winner Luxembourg passing up its right to host the event for a second consecutive year on the grounds of expense, the 1974 contest was to take place at the UK's grand Brighton Dome, built at the British seaside resort for the Prince Regent in 1803. Seventeen countries would compete, with Greece making its debut and France dropping out as a mark of respect following the death of President Georges Pompidou.

As was Eurovision tradition, the entrants were mostly obscure, old-fashioned or arcane. To modern audiences, their names and faces now mean little: it's unlikely that Yugoslavian rockers Korni Grupa or Israel's long-defunct Poogy exist beyond the realms of the toughest pub quizzes.

The notable exception was soon-to-be *Grease* star Olivia Newton-John, representing the UK with 'Long Live Love',

Performing 'Waterloo' at the Melodifestivalen

a twee singalong she secretly hated. “Once a week you’d sing on TV and people would write in and vote for the one they wanted,” reflected the singer in one interview. “So the people voted this one. Then I had to go sing it for the country, not liking it, which wasn’t easy.”

Meanwhile, from across the Baltic Sea came the Swedish hot-tips, billed by Eurovision’s TV commentator as ‘the ABBA group’. “We changed into our stage outfits at the hotel,” Björn recalled in *Billboard* of preparations for the show on 6 April, “and a bus came to take us to the arena. I was overweight and couldn’t sit down because my trousers would split.”

Eight songs into an unspectacular competition, all eyes were suddenly on ABBA. Following a bizarre lead-in from producer Sven-Olof Walldoff in full Napoleon costume, the band burst onto the stage and into pop culture, wearing eye-catching costumes that included Björn’s shuriken-shaped guitar and stacked-heel silver boots. “They enter Eurovision singing about the Battle of Waterloo in platforms,” reflected Oasis leader and unlikely ABBA fan Noel Gallagher in 2004. “Fucking come on, all shagging each other? Get in, does it get better than that?”

“My grandson couldn’t believe that the chubby guy with the star-shaped guitar was me,” reflected a seventy-something Björn in a video message before the 2020 contest. “He looked incredulous. And to tell you the truth, when I watch that clip from the Eurovision Song Contest in Brighton, I find it very hard to believe as well. But then, the ESC is one hell of a launching pad.”

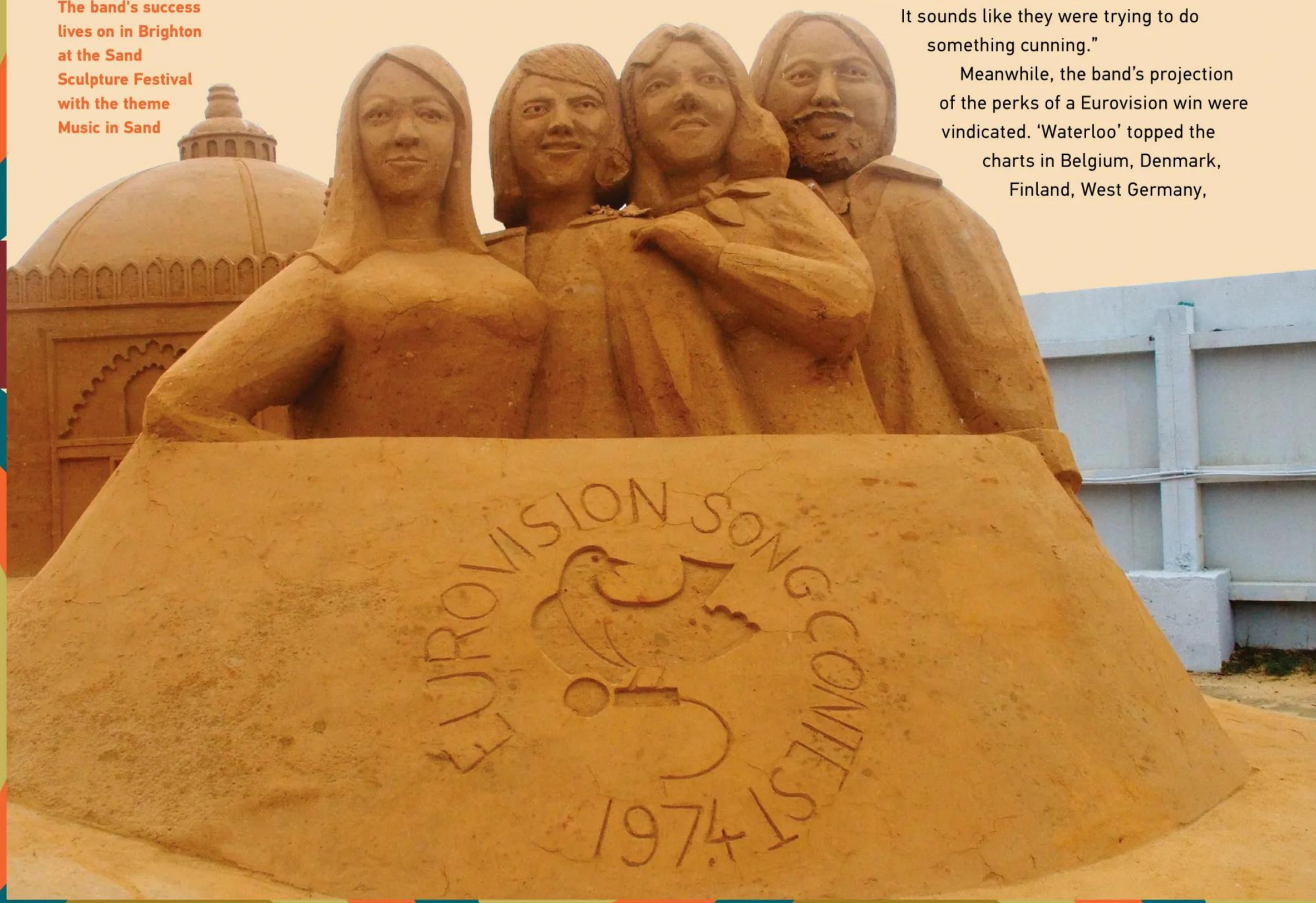
No kidding. Having ripped through ‘Waterloo’ in slightly halting English (by happy chance, the rule that required entrants to sing in their native tongue was dropped in 1974), ABBA became the night’s runaway winners. By the time the dust settled, the Swedish entry had racked up a total of 24 points, easily beating closest contenders Italy (Gigliola Cinquetti’s ‘Si’, with 18 points), and the Netherlands (Mouth & MacNeal’s ‘I See A Star’, with 15 points). As for Newton-John’s ‘Long Live Love’, that came in fourth place, with 14 points.

“Well, actually I had a £20 bet on it, in Brighton, at 20/1,” Benny told the Music Business Worldwide site of the triumphant moment. “There were some good songs, but I did think that ours was better. I was standing there, and I’m good at mental arithmetic, so I knew exactly the moment where we would win even if we got no more votes, and I told the others, ‘That’s it, we’ve done it’.”

Following the victory, and appropriately enough, the band spent the night partying at the Napoleon Suite of the Grand Brighton Hotel. “I think the best memory was afterwards, when I finally got to bed at three o’clock in the

Images: Getty Images

Enjoying some beach time on Brighton's pebbled shore after the contest



The band's success lives on in Brighton at the Sand Sculpture Festival with the theme Music in Sand

morning," reflected Björn to Eurovision TV. "And I realised that we had gone from being a fairly unknown group in Sweden to a group that everyone had seen. The world was open to us, just overnight, and when that dawned on me, that was the most fantastic experience."

Without 'Waterloo' and Eurovision, ABBA might have remained a cult concern in a cultural backwater; portfolio musicians spinning endless plates just to stay solvent. But with that performance to light the touchpaper, their entire outlook and trajectory changed.

"Before that," Björn told Sky News, "Benny and I had been in a rat race. We were running around producing other people's records, writing songs for other people, even going on tours in different constellations just to pay the rent. From 'Waterloo' onward, when the royalties came pouring in, we could afford to say 'no' to everything else and concentrate on the writing. That's when you get better at it. And that's what I wish for most songwriters today."

Notoriously, the UK's Eurovision panel didn't cast a single vote for Sweden. Thankfully it seemed the British public knew better. The studio version of 'Waterloo' had been recorded the previous December at Metronome Studio with regular ABBA contributors Janne Schaffer, Rutger Gunnarsson and Ola Brunkert. Now, with the 'Waterloo' single already pressed and shipping across Europe, the song raced up the charts to become the band's first UK#1. "The Brits were the first ones to embrace us after winning," Björn told BBC Breakfast in 2021. "Kind of strange they would give us zero points. It sounds like they were trying to do something cunning."

Meanwhile, the band's projection of the perks of a Eurovision win were vindicated. 'Waterloo' topped the charts in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, West Germany,

Ireland, Norway and Switzerland, while scaling the Top 3 in Austria, France, Holland and Spain.

The song would doubtless have hit #1 on the band's home turf of Sweden, too, had a quirk of the country's charting system not meant that singles and albums appeared in the same rundown, leading to 'Waterloo' (the song) being held off the top spot by *Waterloo* (the album, also released that year). "There's never such a thing as a guaranteed success, never," Björn told the *Liverpool Echo*. "No one knows. I've experienced that so often in my life, that people think it's a no-brainer."

But Europe was just the start. Marching onward, the 'Waterloo' single also broke into the Top 10 of such untapped but highly lucrative markets as Australia, South Africa, Canada, New Zealand, Rhodesia and critically, the US, whose customary coolness towards the Swedes warmed a little. "Just when the Top 40 was plumbing hitherto-unfathomable, moribund depths, along came their single, 'Waterloo'," wrote Ken Barnes in his *Rolling Stone* review. "A modern-day 'girl group' production with the brightest, most exuberant sound around, it's made button-punching on the car radio a worthwhile pastime again."

Even so, the popular narrative of an overnight success doesn't quite square with what happened next. Curiously, in the wake of 'Waterloo', and with the pop industry's jugular exposed, ABBA released a run of tanking singles that saw their stock plummet. 'Honey, Honey', the aforementioned 'Hasta Mañana', the limp 'So Long', the long-forgotten 'I've Been Waiting For You' – all were non-charting misfires in the UK that did much to sap the band's briefly rocketing momentum.

Womble Uncle Bulgaria joins the fab four at the Eurovision Song Contest

"It was a very difficult period," Björn told *Billboard*. "We thought we should release something more rock 'n' roll. 'So Long' was more in the vein of Sweet and Mud and all those groups. That was a mistake. But everyone had decided we were a one-hit wonder because we came from Eurovision. And, with very few exceptions, they are one-hit wonders. So that helped, especially in the UK, to hold us back."

"After we won the Eurovision Song Contest and had a big hit with 'Waterloo' all over the world," picked up Benny in an interview with SBS, "then nothing happened, like often is the way with Eurovision Song Contest contenders. So from sending us big limousines in the 'Waterloo' period, the cars got smaller and smaller and we had a Volkswagen bus by the end!"

Maybe so, but the bigger-picture impact of Eurovision on ABBA's career cannot be understated. 'Waterloo' represented far more than one night of fleeting glory. When ABBA regrouped and once again struck gold with the perfect song (1975's 'S.O.S'), the groundwork laid by Eurovision ensured they had the platform and profile to fly. From that moment on, the world was theirs for the taking.

"EVERYONE HAD DECIDED WE WERE A ONE-HIT WONDER. THAT HELPED HOLD US BACK"

BJÖRN ON ABBA'S STRUGGLES AFTER WINNING EUROVISION IN 1974

Images: Getty Images, Alamy

Italy's Gigliola Cinquetti touches down in the UK, 4 April 1974

"THEY DECIDED CINQUETTI'S HIT MIGHT HAVE AN UNDUE EFFECT ON THE MINDS OF ITALIANS"

DISCO AND DISCONTENT

It's all europop fun until you get nil points from your European neighbours

WORDS **NINA MATTIELLO AZADEH**

Controversial beginnings

While the Eurovision Song Contest is renowned for its bright colours, comic costumes and europop beats, it is hard to deny the subtle – and often not-so-subtle – forays into the political sphere. With allegiances and disputes on display for the whole Eurovision Network to see, we take a look at some of the biggest controversies in the competition's history.

1974: Sì o no?

Many countries that currently take part in the competition choose to sing in English, but in 1974 it was Gigliola Cinquetti singing in her mother tongue that caused uproar in Italy. Cinquetti had won the competition in 1964 with 'Non ho l'età', translating to 'I'm not old enough'. Ten years later, when she was indeed older, she performed the ballad 'Sì' (meaning 'Yes'). At the time, Italy was in the throes of a referendum over legalising divorce, with the public due to vote less than one month after the competition. The Italian broadcasting service decided that Cinquetti's hit might have an undue effect on the minds of Italians and delayed the broadcast of the Eurovision Song Contest from that year until after the vote had taken place.

1975: Commercial music meets it's Waterloo

The following year Eurovision once again sparked controversy, this time in Sweden. ABBA had made history in 1974, winning the competition with their hit 'Waterloo'. As per the rules we know today, Sweden were then set to host in 1975, but not everyone was happy about it. During the week leading up to the final, held at Stockholmsmässan, tensions rose. A protest began, with Swedes taking to the streets and shouting 'music for profit is crap'. They were fighting the industry being created around Eurovision-style music. Stefan Wermelin worked for Swedish radio broadcaster Sveriges Radio at the time. He believed that the protests were not totally anti-commercial but instead a means of sharing different, more traditional Swedish music with the world. Protesters even created an alternative festival – literally Alternativfestivalen – in which Sweden's most celebrated (and often left-wing) musicians performed in public squares. It was due to these demonstrations that Sweden decided not to compete the following year.

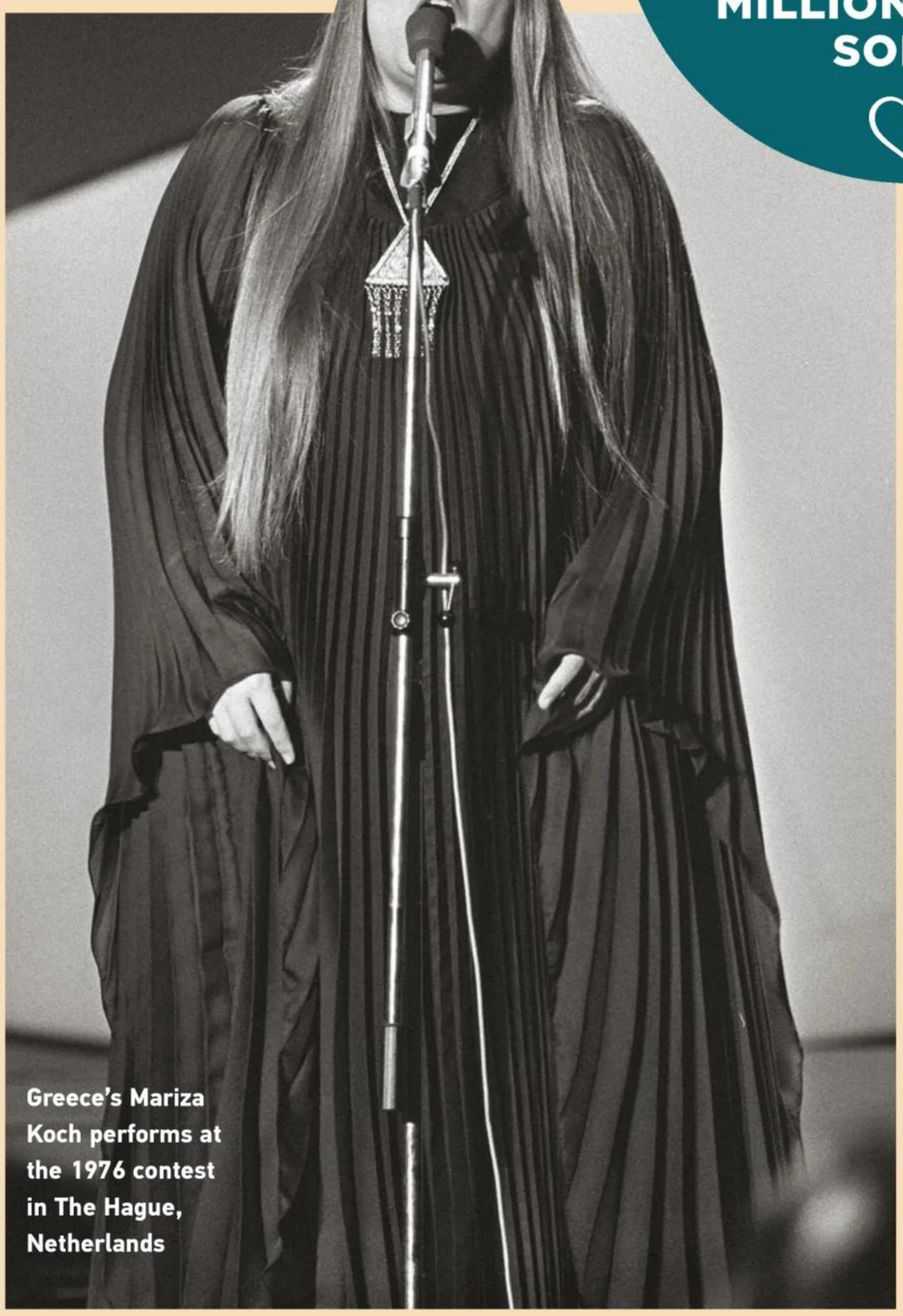
1976: Lyrical disharmony

Political tension moved across the European spectrum in 1976, and Turkey's invasion of Greek Cyprus was beginning to cause issues on the Eurovision stage. It had been decided by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) in 1975 that Turkey would compete. In 1963 Turkey had sought close alliances with Europe, becoming associated with the European Economic Community. These ties did not translate smoothly into the Song Contest, with Greece choosing to withdraw its entry in protest that same year. In 1976, both countries were billed to compete again. This time, the Turkish broadcaster refused to televise the Greek performance of 'Panaghia Mou, Panaghia Mou' (My lady,

© Getty Images

Disgruntled Swedes (around 200,000 in total) take to the streets of Stockholm to protest against hosting the Eurovision Song Contest, 22 March 1975

"IT IS ONE OF THE BIGGEST-SELLING EUROVISION SONGS OF ALL TIME, WITH OVER 5 MILLION COPIES SOLD"



Greece's Mariza Koch performs at the 1976 contest in The Hague, Netherlands

Brotherhood of Man, winners of the 1976 contest

my lady), performed by Mariza Koch. Turkish broadcasters were enraged by the associations with the invasion in lyrics such as 'And if you see shattered ruins, oh-oh my Mother / It's not from other, from other eras / It is burnt by napalm, oh-oh my Mother / Since yesterday, there are countless crumbled rocks'.

1976 was a record year for another reason. Since 1967, the United Kingdom's entry had placed in the top five positions, winning twice and coming second four times. In 1976 the UK won for a third time with 'Save Your Kisses for Me' by the pop group Brotherhood of Man. To this day it is one of the biggest-selling Eurovision singles of all time, with over 5 million copies sold. This success, however, was short-lived, with the UK receiving its worst score (up to that point) two years later.

1977: The contest of discontent

The following year was not only controversial within the judging panel for the UK but behind the camera too. Soaring inflation led to increasing numbers of strikes throughout the 1970s, culminating in what became known as the 'Winter of Discontent' in 1978. Broadcasters were not immune to these calls for change, and in the spring of 1977 BBC cameramen downed tools in a call for better working conditions. This had ramifications for the Song for Europe competition in which the UK's panel chose their competitor for the Europe-wide competition. The contest final was due to take place on 2 April 1977 at the newly built Wembley Conference Centre, it was put on hold for five weeks while the strikes were resolved. Other members of the EBU were called upon to host the competition in the absence of the UK coming to an arrangement. Most notable of those asked was the Netherlands; their own broadcasters' camera crews refused in solidarity with the BBC staff.

Resembling a cheerful circus act, Co-Co may have struggled, but a future star stood among them

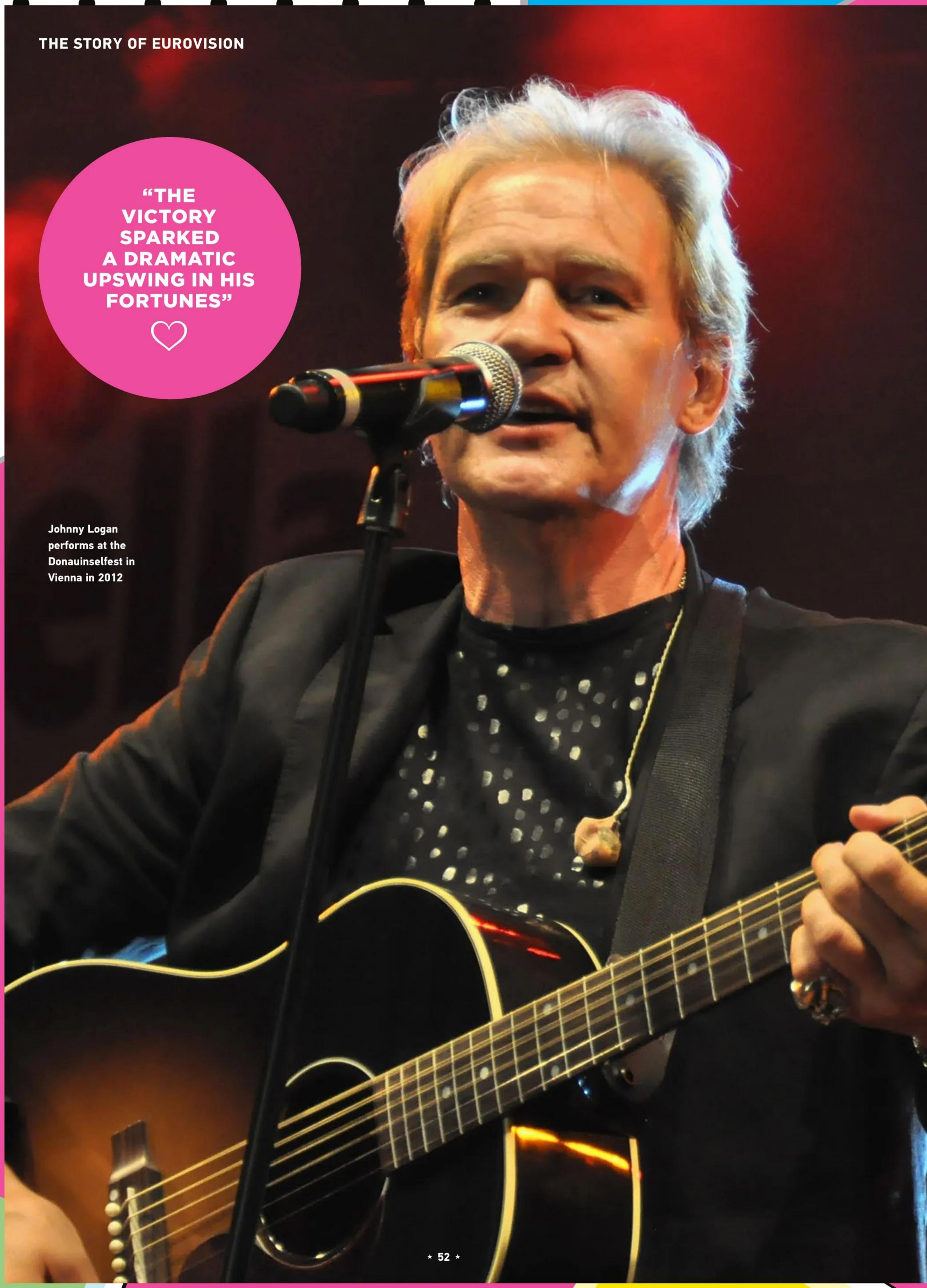
1978: And second place goes to...

As noted, the UK received its worst score to date in 1978. Co-Co's unlucky performance of 'The Bad Old Days' was broadcast around the EBU network, unlike the winning Israeli candidate. The EBU had decided to allow Israel to join the competition – the only non-European country to do so at that time – in 1973. This was primarily because the broadcaster in Israel was already part of the EBU network.

Israel got off to a strong start, winning for the first time in 1978 with 'A-Ba-Ni-Bi' by Izhar Cohen and the Alphabeta. Once again, political tension caused disruption to the broadcasting. Jordan refused to broadcast the performance and the footage of Israel taking the title. Instead, Jordanian broadcasters decided to announce that Belgium (the runners up) had in fact won the competition that year.

© Getty Images, Alamy

"THE VICTORY SPARKED A DRAMATIC UPSWING IN HIS FORTUNES"



Johnny Logan performs at the Donauinselfest in Vienna in 2012

MR EUROVISION

With three Eurovision wins to his name, Irish singer and composer Johnny Logan is without equal

WORDS **NEIL CROSSLEY**

As Eurovision legends go, Johnny Logan is up there with the very best of them. Until Loreen's win in 2023, Logan reigned as the only person to have won the Eurovision Song Contest twice – in 1980 and 1987. He also has the rare distinction of writing the winning song in 1992.

Logan was born Seán Patrick Michael Sherrard on 13 May, 1954 in Frankston, near Melbourne, Australia. When he was three years old the family moved to Ireland, settling in Howth, east of Dublin. By the time he was 12 Logan was accompanying his father, the Irish tenor Patrick O'Hagan, on tours back to Australia and New Zealand.

After leaving school he apprenticed as an electrician while performing in pubs and cabaret. By then his abundant talent, love of music, self-belief and drive had convinced him that he must pursue a career in music.

Logan's first real claim to fame was starring in the lead role of 'Adam' in the 1976 Irish rock musical *Adam and Eve*. One year later he played Joseph in *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*.

By 1978 he had released his first single and adopted the stage name Johnny Logan, inspired by the main character in the film *Johnny Guitar*. The following year, Logan performed his own composition 'Angie' in the Irish National Song Contest, finishing third.

His big chance came the following year when he was selected to sing Shay Healy's song 'What's Another Year' as Ireland's selection for the 1980 Eurovision Song Contest. The song won the Irish final, and on 19 April Logan sang his way to victory in The Hague.

The song became a hit across Europe and reached Number One in the UK. He followed this triumph by releasing two singles, 'In London' and 'Save Me', but both failed to chart.

In 1984 he composed 'Terminal 3', the Irish Eurovision Song Contest entry for singer Linda Martin, which was placed second in the contest. He also collaborated on the chart-topping single 'You'll Never Walk Alone' in aid of the Bradford City Disaster Fund. But a stream of singles and the 1985 album *Straight From the Heart* didn't make a dent on the charts.

It wasn't until 1987 that his fortunes really changed. Logan had written a song called 'Hold Me Now', and he represented Ireland with the track at the 1987 Eurovision Song Contest in Belgium. Dressed in white and against a plaintive piano intro, Logan walked out onto the sound stage and delivered an emotive and powerful performance, his warm, rich timbre shifting effortlessly between tenor and falsetto. The song won the contest and Logan became the first person to win the Eurovision Song Contest twice.

The victory sparked a dramatic upswing in his fortunes. The track became a major European hit and yielded an album of the same name. In 1988, his single 'Heartland' became a huge hit in the Irish charts.

Four years later he secured his third Eurovision win, writing the Irish entry 'Why Me?', another song for Linda Martin, which took the title at the 1992 Eurovision Song Contest final in Malmö, Sweden, by 16 points, beating the UK into second. This cemented Logan's reputation as the most successful artist in the contest's history.

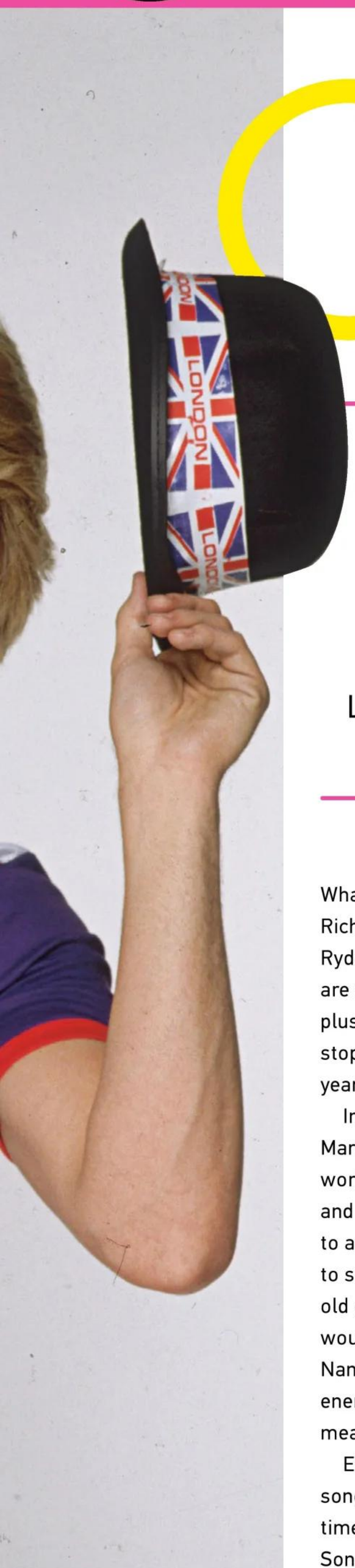
Almost five decades on from the release of Johnny Logan's first single, he continues to perform and write songs and has particular success in the Scandinavian market. His 2007 album, *The Irish Connection*, went platinum in Denmark, twice platinum in Norway and gold in Sweden. In a red carpet interview by German TV channel TIKonline in February 2020, Logan looked back with fondness on his career. When asked to name his favourite from all the songs he had written, he didn't miss a beat.

"'Hold Me' is a very big song for me," he said. "It keeps reinventing itself. I love that song, but they're like my children. I love all of them."

© Getty Images, Alamy

“MARTIN CHRISTENED THEM AFTER HER FAVOURITE DRINK, A CHAMPAGNE AND ORANGE JUICE BLEND”

Any guesses which country Bucks Fizz represented in 1981? (Clockwise from top left) it’s Bobby G, Mike Nolan, Cheryl Baker and Jay Aston



BANG FOR YOUR BUCKS (FIZZ)

Let's not skirt the issue – Eurovision 1981 was won by a stage move rather than a song, but what a stage move it was!

WORDS **JOEL McIVER**

What's your ultimate Eurovision performance? Cliff Richard, ABBA, Dana International, Gina G, Lordi, Sam Ryder? Your answer will probably depend on how old you are and where you're from, but for anyone who is aged 45-plus and British, the obvious all-time highlight is the show-stopping 1981 performance by Bucks Fizz. Let's go back 42 years and see what happened...

In late 1980, a couple of songwriters called Nichola Martin and Andy Hill had a song that they thought might work at the following year's Eurovision. Sparky, upbeat and catchy, 'Making Your Mind Up' sounded like a winner to anyone who heard it, but Martin and Hill needed a group to sing it – and it was crucial that they looked the part. An old geezer from yesteryear like Engelbert Humperdinck wouldn't do it justice, and nor would a solo singer like Nana Mouskouri: what was needed was a bunch of energetic twenty-somethings who would dance like they meant it and look great at the same time.

Enter Mike Nolan, a chum of Martin's: together with the songwriters themselves, he recorded a demo of the song in time for submission to the preliminary heats, then called A Song For Europe. Martin then recruited Cheryl Baker, who had competed at Eurovision in 1978 in a band called Co-Co; another female singer called Jay Aston; and a chap called Stephen Fischer, although he was quickly replaced by Robert 'Bobby G' Gubby after a scheduling clash. Looking for a name for the group, Martin christened them after her favourite drink, Buck's fizz, a very eighties champagne and orange-juice blend.

And so, after dropping that annoying apostrophe, Bucks Fizz were born. A manager called Jill Shirley signed on and, once 'Making Your Mind Up' had received the thumbs-up from *A Song For Europe*, preparations began in earnest for Eurovision. In rehearsals, someone – possibly Martin, Baker, Aston or choreographer Chrissie Wickham – came up with the idea of the male singers whipping off the dresses of the women to reveal shorter skirts beneath, all while singing and not missing a dance move. The same routine had apparently been seen before, when the group Rags played in *A Song For Europe* back in 1977, and later on *Top of the Pops*.

Top of the scoring

The 1981 instalment of Eurovision was set to take place on 4 April in Dublin, Ireland, after 1980's victory by Johnny Logan. With excellent timing, 'Making Your Mind Up' was released as a single in the UK in March, and by the time Eurovision rolled around it was Number Two in the charts.

The event, held at the Royal Dublin Society venue and hosted by presenter Doireann Ní Bhriain, saw 20 countries in competition, an equal record with the 1978 event. Cyprus made its debut, while Israel and Yugoslavia both returned after one-year and five-year absences; Italy didn't participate; and Morocco, which had debuted in 1980, didn't return in this or any subsequent year, one shot at Eurovision having apparently been more than enough.

Once again the Irish authorities were keenly aware that hosting the event came with a certain amount of risk given the political tensions north of the border, and they duly stepped up their security precautions. The RDS venue, which normally hosted agricultural shows, saw 250 armed soldiers and police officers patrolling the 150-foot-wide set, which didn't exactly lead to a relaxed atmosphere; indeed, at one point the participants' hotel was evacuated after a bomb scare.

Half a billion viewers tuned in to watch, with Eurovision broadcast more or less worldwide by this stage, and after the usual postcards introduction, the performances began.

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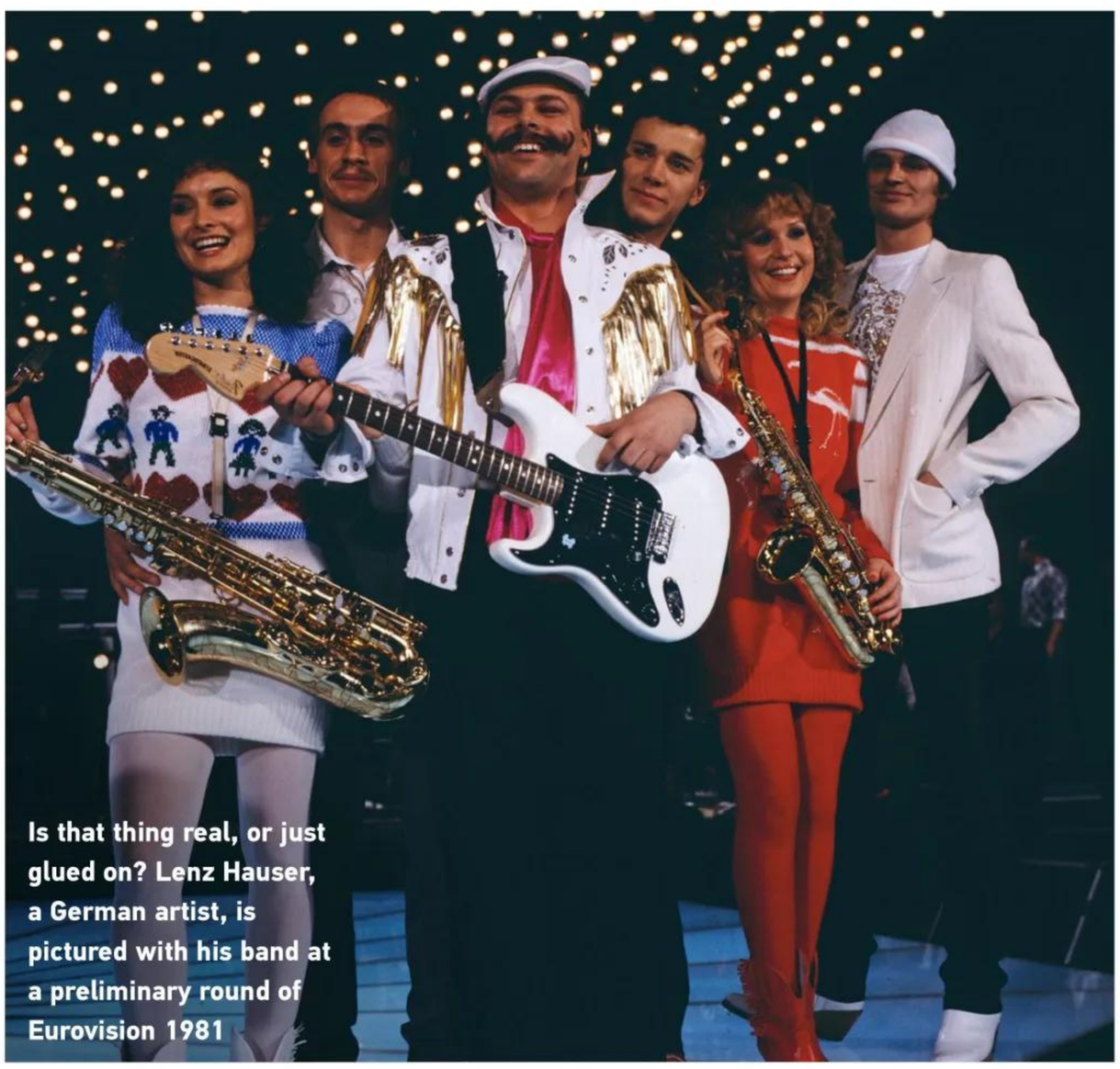


Is that thing real, or just glued on? Lenz Hauser, a German artist, is pictured with his band at a preliminary round of Eurovision 1981

The Netherlands' Linda Williams leaving Schiphol Airport bound for Dublin

BANG FOR YOUR BUCKS (FIZZ)

Left: The Irish band Sheeba, who finished fifth in Eurovision 1981, sign autographs for local police officer, Mick Dunphy. (From left to right) Frances Campbell, Marion Fossett and Maxi

"ONCE THE TWO DRESSES WERE PULLED OFF THE AUDIENCE STARTED PAYING ATTENTION"

Below: Germany's entrant Lena Valaitis, who came second in Eurovision 1981, poses with her song's composer, Ralph Siegel

Bucks Fizz played in 14th place and didn't exactly wow the audience for the first section of the song: Cheryl Baker has subsequently said that she sang the song in the wrong key because she was so nervous, while Mike Nolan claimed that the microphones got mixed up, with Baker's and Aston's vocals mixed incorrectly high. However, once the big moment came and the two dresses were pulled off and thrown aside the audience and judges started paying attention, and indeed, on looking back on the largely bland roster of performances, this was the moment of the night.

It was a close contest. At first France took the lead with maximum points from three juries, but Ireland soon overtook them. The UK, Switzerland and Germany battled it out from then on, meaning that five countries were at the top of the scoreboard at some point. The turning point came with the penultimate vote, when the UK needed five points to win and received eight: with only four points in it, this was the closest contest to date under the current voting structure. Meanwhile, poor Norway ended up with zero points for the third time in history. Norwegian TV's head of light entertainment, Harald Tusberg, didn't care, accurately pointing out, "Who remembers who came second or third – people will remember us!"

Still bubbling today

There was some surreal comedy that year, with Ireland accidentally getting 310 points from Luxembourg when some backstage tech's finger slipped and Yugoslavia's spokeswoman saying "I don't have it!" when referring to her jury's votes and causing hilarity.

At the same time there was some bitterness, with Swedish singer Björn Skifs whining, "This was not a song contest, it was a show – all these dancing girls, they take away from the songs." France was equally snooty, declaring that the songs were "a monument to drivel".

These comments clearly referred to Bucks Fizz, but they couldn't care less: their song went to Number One in the UK and sold 4 million copies worldwide, making them instant stars. The career of any Eurovision winner is usually a short one, but the four musicians stayed in the limelight longer than most, releasing a series of hit singles over the next three years or so. In fact they're still touring all these years later, albeit in two separate camps, the most visible being Cheryl Baker, Mike Nolan and Jay Aston's trio The Fizz, the other being Bucks Fizz, which comprises Bobby G, his wife and two other singers. Baker has also built a successful TV career and is probably the most visible of all of them.

The legacy of Bucks Fizz was reinforced from 2004 to 2007, when the BBC borrowed the title of 'Making Your Mind Up' for its Eurovision selection show. That's worth douze points, if you ask us.

© Getty Images

GOING GLOBAL

As the eighties took hold, Eurovision embraced new styles and expanded its global reach

WORDS **NEIL CROSSLEY**

As Eurovision Song Contest settings go, the genteel Yorkshire spa town of Harrogate is one of the less likely locations in the competition's history. It was a fact not lost on the organisers of the 27th Eurovision Song Contest in 1982. "Ou est Harrogate?" and "Hvor er Harrogate?" were just two of the captions on the quaint, medieval-style map in the opening graphics of the BBC TV coverage.

Following the victory of Bucks Fizz in 1981, the UK had been automatically selected as the host country and the town's newly opened Convention Centre – with its 2,000 seater auditorium and ten events halls and meeting spaces – was deemed the ideal venue for the event.

The 1982 Eurovision Song Contest would go on to attract a record 700 million viewers. It would also herald a new era in which the contest would expand its global reach.

State-of-the-art

Eighteen countries lined up for the Eurovision Song Contest 1982. It would have been 20, but France pulled out when its broadcaster TF1 withdrew, snobbishly describing the contest as a "monument to drivel". Then Greece was also forced to pull out when it was discovered that its intended entry had been previously released and was based on a Greek folk song.

The 1982 contest featured a new element in televisual terms. The 'postcards' representing the competing countries featured state-of-the-art video technology and marked the first time the contest had utilised such clips in its broadcast.

Expectation was high for the United Kingdom, with the song 'One Step Further', sung by the pop duo Bardo – Sally Ann Triplett and Steve Fisher. But the song came seventh and it was West Germany who dominated the voting, going on to win with 61 points, the biggest margin seen at that point under the new scoring system.

Purity and peace

The song that propelled West Germany to the top slot was

Trying not to draw any attention, Bill van Dijk, the Dutch entrant in 1982, rides a clog down a canal in Harrogate, as you do

“THE 1982 CONTEST WOULD GO ON TO ATTRACT A RECORD 700 MILLION VIEWERS”

© Alamy

‘Ein bißchen Frieden’ (A little peace), sung by 17-year-old German singer Nicole Seibert, with music composed by Ralph Siegel and lyrics by Bernd Meinunger and Paul Greedus (English version). In a year when choreographed gimmicks and spectacle prevailed, Nicole’s performance stood out for its sheer simplicity. Perched on a stool with a white 12-string acoustic guitar and singing straight to camera, it was the quality of the song and the purity of her performance that won the day.

“It’s a song about peace,” recalled Seibert in the 2015 documentary *Eurovision Song Contest at 60*. “So you can’t be running over the stage from this side to the other side. You have to concentrate on the lyrics and the message. I didn’t see the audience and I didn’t want to know that 700 million people were looking at me.”

For Seibert, the most important aspect of the whole contest was that Israel awarded West Germany the highest possible score. “It was the fact that a German girl with a song about peace got 12 points from Israel,” recalled a clearly moved Seibert. “Ralf took my hand and said ‘That’s incredible... The first time Germany gets 12 points from Israel and we know our history’.”

When Seibert took to the stage again to reprise the winning song, she decided in a moment of spontaneity to sing the song in four languages. She went on to sing in English, French, Dutch and then back to German, all of which prompted huge applause but came as something of a shock to her band. “They looked at each other and said ‘What’s going on?’,” she laughed.

Eurovision Down Under

The global reach of Eurovision was expanded in 1983 when the Australian broadcast network SBS announced it would be broadcasting the 28th Eurovision Song Contest, held in Munich. The contest would go on to attract a strong viewing audience in Australia.

Twenty countries competed in that year’s event, with Greece and France returning. Italy also came back into the fold, but Ireland was forced to withdraw following a financial crisis at the broadcaster RTE.

Dancer and entertainer Marlene Charell hosted the event, held at the Rudi-Sedlmayer-Halle in Munich on 23 April 1983. Charell chose to announce the points in German, before translating into French and English.

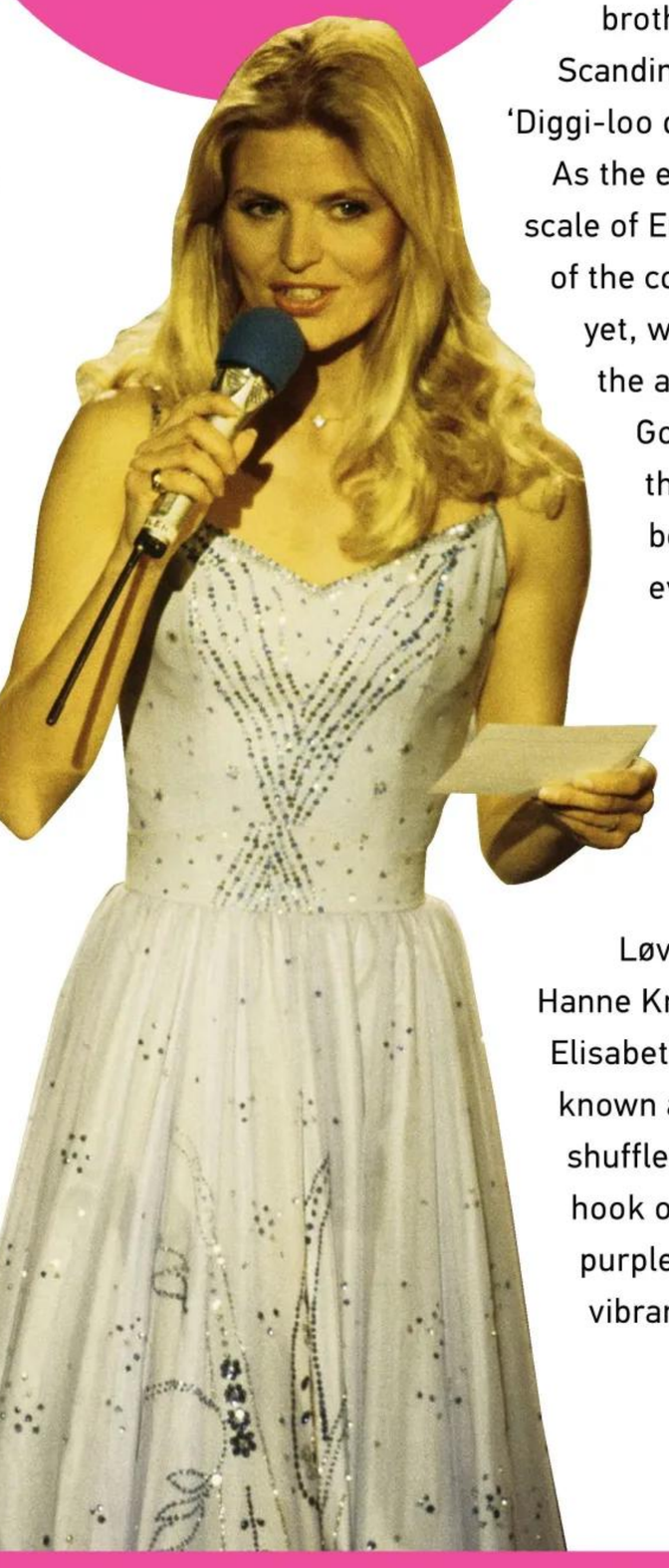
Unfortunately, Charell also allegedly made 13 language mistakes throughout the voting, the most pivotal resulting in her nearly awarding points to ‘Schweden’ (Sweden) that were actually meant for ‘Schweiz’ (Switzerland).”

A dream realised

Israel, Sweden and Yugoslavia all looked strong contenders as the evening progressed, but it was Luxembourg that would ultimately triumph with ‘Si la vie est cadeau’, sung by French singer Corrine Hermes. This was the fifth time Luxembourg had won the contest, a feat that equalled the record set by France.

Standing motionless in a pale pink trouser suit, Hermes exuded intense concentration as the intro of stirring strings and a percussive guitar motif started up. What followed was a stirring power ballad, with Hermes’ voice hitting real emotive heights on the chorus.

“THIS WAS THE FIFTH TIME LUXEMBOURG HAD WON THE CONTEST”



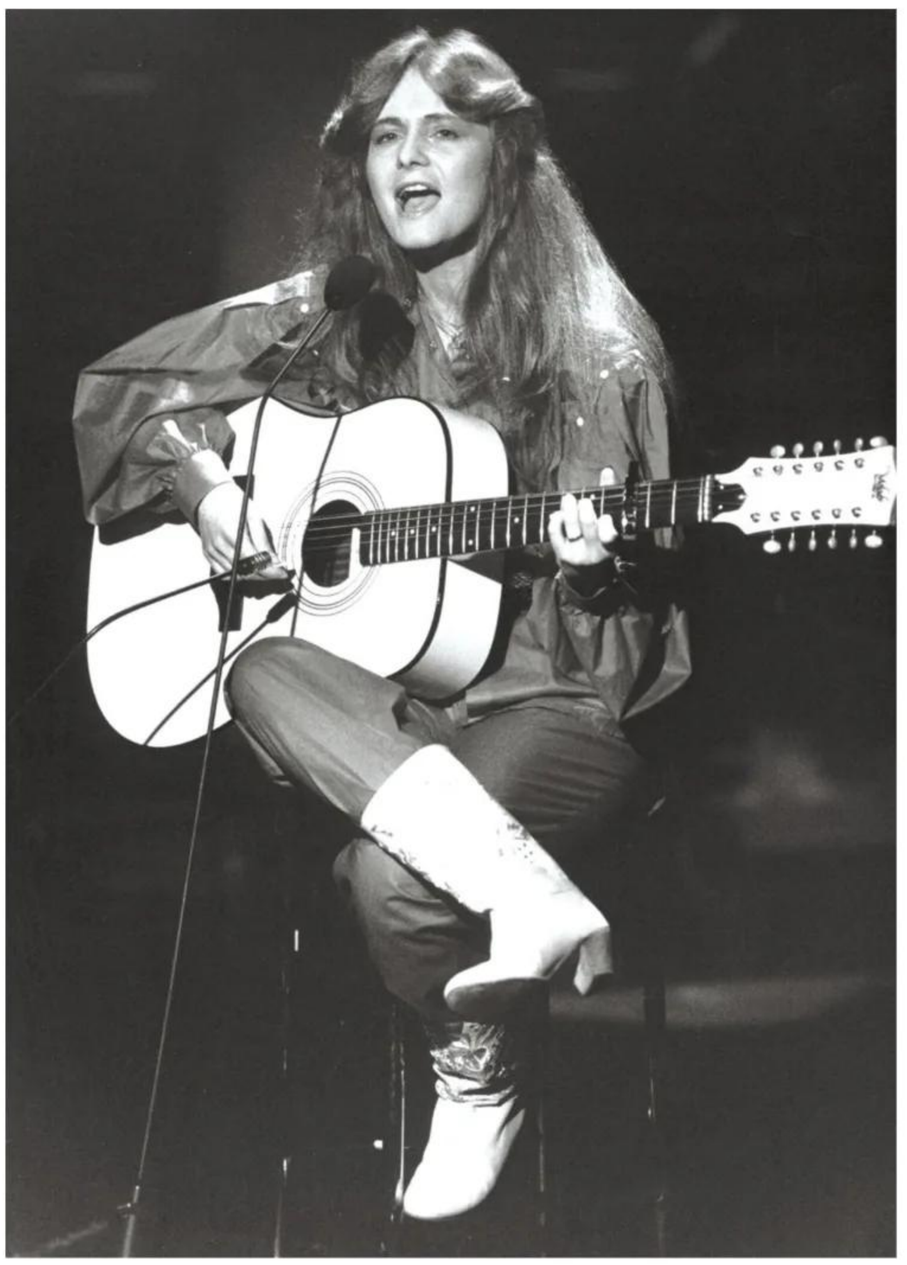
Scandinavian successes

The 29th Eurovision Song Contest on 5 May 1984 featured its youngest host to date, as 19-year-old actor and TV presenter Désirée Nosbusch took the stage at the Theatre Municipal in Luxembourg City, Luxembourg. Nineteen countries took part and Ireland returned after its absence the previous year. One decade after ABBA had earned Sweden its first Eurovision win, the three brothers known as Herreys gave the Scandinavian country its second with ‘Diggi-loo diggi–ley’.

As the eighties progressed so too did the scale of Eurovision. The 30th anniversary of the contest in 1985 was the largest yet, with over 8,000 spectators in the audience of the Scandiavium in Gothenburg, Sweden. It was also the first Eurovision Song Contest to be broadcast live via satellite. The event was now truly global.

This was also the year that perennial strugglers Norway stunned Europe by winning Eurovision for the first time. The song was ‘La det swinge’ (Let it swing), written by Rolf Løvland and performed by Norwegian Hanne Krogh and Swedish-Norwegian Elisabeth Andreassen, a pop duo better known as Bobbysocks! It’s a pacy, upbeat shuffle with strident horns and a strong hook on the chorus. The duo, dressed in purple sequinned jackets, delivered a vibrant, jubilant performance.

Ofra Haza performs 'Hi', Israel's entry for Eurovision 1983



Above: The Norwegian duo Bobbysocks are mobbed in Oslo following their victory

Left: 17-year-old Nicole Seibert belts out her winning song

© Getty Images, Alamy

Swedish trio Herreys, featuring brothers Richard, Per and Louis, won in 1984

Belgian singer Sandra Kim, the winner of the 1986 contest, congratulates Johnny Logan, Irish winner of the 1987 contest

"I remember very well they won in the neighbouring country of Sweden, which also gave it a special touch," beamed Jon Ola Sand, executive supervisor Eurovision Song Contest, in the 2015 documentary *Eurovision Song Contest At 60*. "They drove back to Oslo, and when they crossed the border into Norway people appeared with flags all the way from the border all the way up to Oslo. It was a fantastic moment."

Landmark moments

The Netherlands and Yugoslavia were absent from the 1985 contest, but they returned in 1986, the year in which Iceland made its debut appearance. Bergen was the setting and 20 countries competed at this 31st contest. This was the first Eurovision Song Contest to openly feature the LGBTQ+ community, when members of the drag group the Great Garlic Girls accompanied the home nation's singer Ketil Stokkan.

This was also the year that Belgium won its first and to date only Eurovision Song Contest with the song 'J'aime la vie', sung by Sandra Kim, who at just 13 years old was the competition's youngest-ever winner. Kim had told the

"PEOPLE APPEARED WITH FLAGS FROM THE BORDER ALL THE WAY UP TO OSLO. IT WAS FANTASTIC"

Right: Elizabeth Andreasson and Hanne Krogh, better known as the duo Bobbysocks!

Below: Johnny Logan sings his way to winning the Eurovision Song Contest for the second time

organisers that she was 15, and when Switzerland, who came second in the contest, discovered this deception, it petitioned for Belgium to be disqualified, but it's bitter move was to no avail.

Double winner

By 1987, a record number of 22 countries were taking part in the contest, which took place on 9 May at the Palais du Centenaire in Brussels. Italy and Greece both returned to join the 20 countries from the previous year. The Soviet Union considered joining but President Gorbachev deemed it too radical a step, even for the country's outward-looking glasnost (openness) policy of the time.

Johnny Logan stormed to victory with his self-penned song 'Hold Me Now'. It was the third win from Ireland and Logan became the first double winner, seven years after claiming his first Eurovision win.

For Logan, a driven and gifted singer and songwriter, the victory at the 1987 contest was a vindication of sorts, a glimmering triumph after seven years in which he had seen his career fail to ignite in the way he had hoped it would after he'd stormed to victory in 1980, beating second-placed Germany by 15 points before seeing his song go on to become a major hit across Europe.

From this point on his fortunes would change forever. As he launched into the final vocal crescendo of the song's reprise that evening, his voice cracked and he broke off. "I can't sing anymore... thank you," he told the audience before turning to walk offstage. It was an emotive and very human moment and was met by a tumultuous roar of applause. It was also a potent reminder of the power of Eurovision to inspire and to unite.

"It's the only pan-European cultural event and it brings nations together like no other events," recalled Jon Ola Sand. "We laugh, we sing, we party."

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CELINE DION... AND ON AND ON

Celine Dion beat the Brits in 1988 even though she wasn't yet a Titanic star, and the kids weren't all right in '89... What the heck was going on, Eurovision?

WORDS **JOEL McIVER**

Most Brits like to think of themselves as gracious losers when required. You win some, you lose some, right? Take victory with a pinch of humility and accept defeat with a smile. Unless, of course, that defeat is snatched from you when you'd already uncorked the champagne. Readers who remember the cruel outcome of Eurovision 1988 will know exactly what we're talking about...

Denied by fate in '88

Thirty-three years into its existence, Eurovision 1988 was the grandest event yet. Held in Dublin's RDS Simmonscourt venue on 30 April and hosted by broadcaster Pat Kenny and Miss Ireland 1980 Michelle Rocca, this edition saw 21 countries style it out after a 22nd, Cyprus, was given the boot for entering a song that had already been considered a few years previously.

A more visually spectacular event than most of us were used to, the '88 soirée featured two giant walls of screens, allowing us to peek behind the scenes at the performers. The stage was the largest to date, and dramatic lighting effects made it look even larger. The interval act was the Irish folk-rock band Hothouse Flowers, who you probably remember from their chirpy anthem 'Don't Go'.

Switzerland's Eurovision 1989 entry, the group Furbaz, who failed to follow up on Celine Dion's astounding victory the previous year

All this was the backdrop to the biggest showdown that Eurovision had witnessed in some years, perhaps decades. The Scottish singer Scott Fitzgerald delivered a banger of a song with 'Go', and the international juries were right behind him all the way: with only three votes to go, the UK had 133 points against the nearest competitor's 118. Victory seemed like a certainty.

The problem was that the nearest competitor was Switzerland, whose singer was among the most talented on the planet. Celine Dion wasn't yet a megastar, but by heck she had some voice on her, and what's more, her song 'Ne partez pas sans moi' was a catchy tune with 'Win!' written all over it.

You can probably figure out what happened next. The UK had a 15-point lead over the Swiss, as we've said, with only France, Portugal and Yugoslavia left to vote. France only gave Switzerland a single point, which was a touch stingy of them given that Dion was singing in their language, but they didn't give the UK any. Worse for Fitzgerald and British hopes, Portugal gave Switzerland the full 12 points and the UK three, meaning that as the final vote was cast the UK was leading by just five points.

Five points? Still, it was a lead, a cushion going into the last points announcement of the night. And then Yugoslavia gave six points to Switzerland. Now the UK was trailing by a single point. But surely Yugoslavia would give Fitzgerald's song more than one point? After all, the Brits loved their country, visiting it every year as a popular summer holiday destination. Just a few points would do it.

“SWITZERLAND’S SINGER WAS AMONG THE MOST TALENTED ON THE PLANET”

What’s the 20-year-old Celine Dion hoping for – a Eurovision win followed by 35 years of global success, countless hits and a half billion-dollar fortune?

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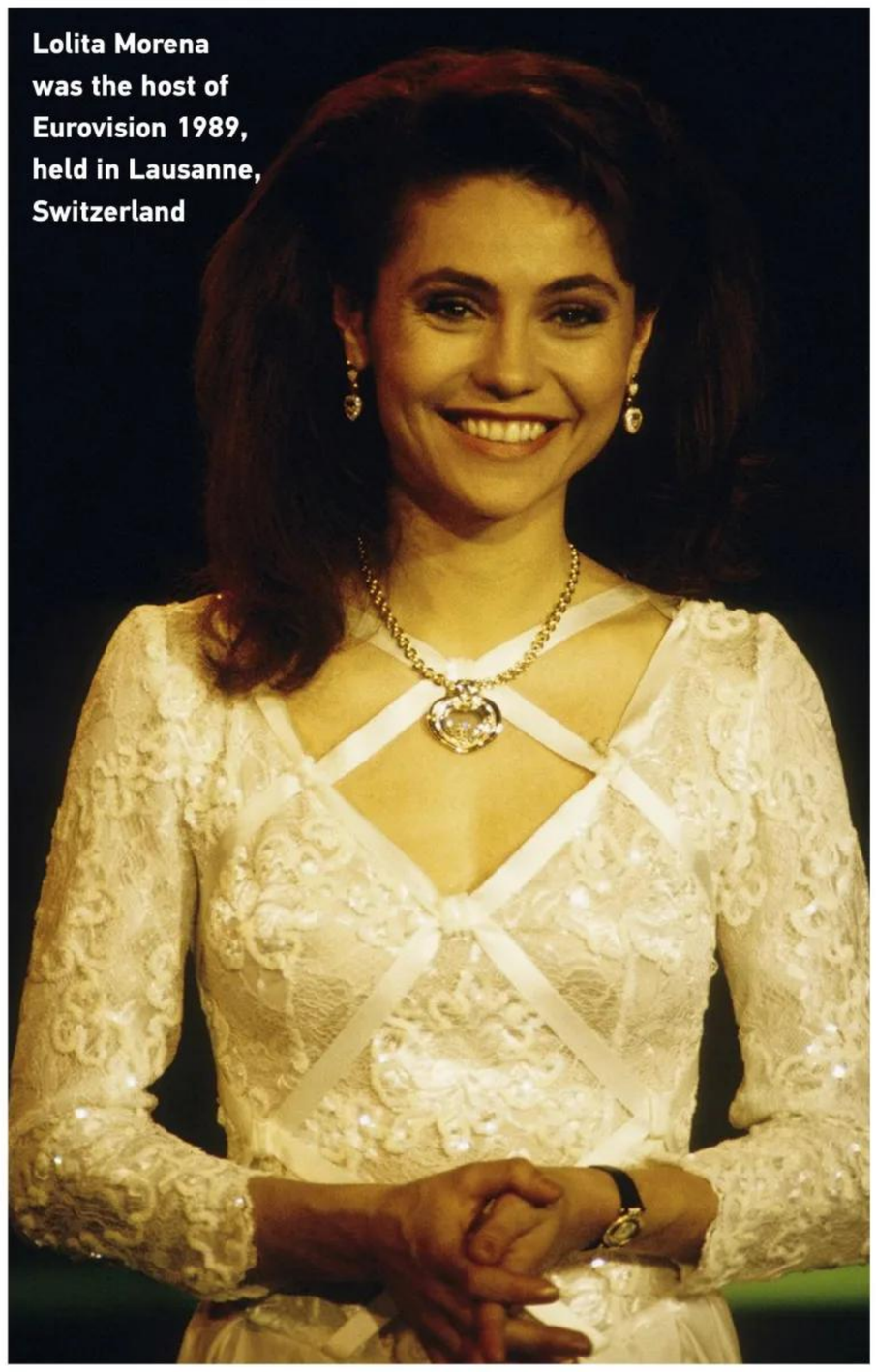

Lolita Morena was the host of Eurovision 1989, held in Lausanne, Switzerland

The Yugoslavian band Riva, who won Eurovision 1989. Sadly, their country soon found itself torn apart by war

German singer Nino de Angelo, who had a crack at Eurovision in 1989. He's still releasing music all these years later

It wasn't to be. Yugoslavia gave the UK zero points. That's right – nul points – meaning that Celine Dion won by a single point.

The British reaction was summed up neatly by the late, great entertainer Bruce Forsyth, who was there on the night, as his daughter Julie had composed Scott Fitzgerald's song. He was beyond annoyed, telling interviewers that the Dutch jury's decision also to give the UK no points had particularly irritated him as he'd done some work in that country.

The UK could take consolation in the fact that it hadn't lost to some nobody, though. Celine Dion went on to become a massive star, up there with fellow mega-lunged warblers such as Whitney Houston and Mariah Carey. There's no shame whatsoever in coming second to a singer of that calibre.

Dion is actually Québécoise, having grown up in French-speaking Canada, and was aged 22 at the time of her Eurovision victory. On winning the contest she and her management executed a neat move into English-speaking music, and after a successful debut album called *Unison* (1990), fame came calling the following year thanks to her duet with soul singer Peabo Bryson on Disney's animated film *Beauty and the Beast*, a performance that bagged Bryson one of his two Grammy awards.

"DION WENT ON TO BECOME A MASSIVE STAR, UP THERE WITH WHITNEY HOUSTON AND MARIAH CAREY"

A sequence of hit albums saw Dion's dominance spread throughout the nineties, but the real turning point came in 1997 when she sang 'My Heart Will Go On' for *Titanic*, the biggest film there has ever been or likely ever will be. That was the game-over moment, the song that made the world into Dion's playground. A quarter of a century on from that point she has receded from view a little but still occupies a hugely elevated status as one of the best-selling artists in history.

It's surreal to think that before Eurovision 1988 Dion was just another hopeful. The fickle finger of fate, eh?

Below: One of the Greek contestants for Eurovision 1988 went by the un-Hellenic name of Amanda Jayne Grant. She is pictured here in classical mode Bottom: The late Joseph Reynaert, who came 18th for Belgium in 1988

1989: The year that Eurovision literally grew up

As the eighties wound down, a decade in which hip-hop and house music had flourished and thrash metal had paved the way for grunge, one certainty remained: that europop was in safe hands. That didn't mean that there was no room for controversy, though.

The 6 May 1989 event took place at the sumptuous Palais de Beaulieu in Lausanne, Switzerland, with model Lolita Morena and journalist Jacques Deschenaux as hosts. Twenty-two countries took part, as Cyprus were returning from their year in Eurovision limbo, and Celine Dion opened the event with 'Ne partez pas sans moi' and a new song, not coincidentally her first English-language single, 'Where Does My Heart Beat Now'.

The show passed uneventfully, with Yugoslavia winning with the song 'Rock Me' by a Croatian band called Riva. The singer with the second-placed British act, Live Report, a chap called Ray Caruana, complained to anyone who would listen that his song was better than Riva's, but no one was listening because an uproar after the show brought an entirely different subject into focus.

It had emerged that Nathalie Pâque and Gili Natanael, the singers for France and Israel respectively, were only 11 and 12 years old when they performed. The problem, although it's hard to be sure so many years after the fact, is thought to have been that the pressure of performing on an event of this scale was too much for a child to bear, and there's some logic to this evidently. Either way, the Eurovision organisers promptly slapped a 16-plus age restriction on future events. The Junior Eurovision event, launched in 2003, became a later vehicle for younger competitors.

The nineties now beckoned. How would Eurovision fare in the decade of Kurt Cobain, Riot Grrrls and dial-up internet? Fans couldn't wait to find out.

© Getty Images

IRISH EYES ARE SMILING

Think of Eurovision in the nineties and one particular country comes to mind – so what was Ireland's winning secret?

WORDS **JOEL McIVER**

1990: Here you go, Yugo

It's sadly ironic that Eurovision 1990 featured a generally positive, perestroika-inspired theme of unity – the infamous Berlin Wall having come down just beforehand – and yet took place in a country that was only two years away from dissolution. Still, when the show opened at Vatroslav Lisinski Concert Hall in Zagreb on 5 May, the event revealed no sign of the stresses that would soon lead to civil warfare. Hosted by the cheerful Croatian presenters Helga Vlahović and Oliver Mlakar, the show included the familiar 22 competing countries, among them the recently created 'Big Five': Italy, France, Spain, the United Kingdom and Germany.

Italy won the 1990 event with Toto Cutugno's song 'Insieme', meaning 'Together', which won votes for its European-unity sentiments. Cutugno, a ripe 46 years and 302 days old at the time, was Eurovision's oldest winner until 50-year-old David Benton helped Estonia to victory in 2001. His song was, superficially at least, a serious one and deserved to be delivered by a senior figure.

Indeed, age was a prevailing theme that year, with the two middle-aged presenters temporarily quitting beforehand over remarks about their maturity and no contestants under 16 permitted.

Every Eurovision needs to have its technical hitch, and this year it was Spain's turn when the sound engineer forgot to feed the audio to their conductor. Still, the error was soon fixed, and people remember 1990 these days more for the appearance of the first official mascot,

Eimear Quinn waves the Irish flag aloft while celebrating her victory with the rest of Ireland's delegation

IRISH EYES ARE SMILING
“EVERY EUROVISION NEEDS TO HAVE ITS TECHNICAL HITCH, AND THIS YEAR IT WAS SPAIN’S TURN”
© Alamy

Eurocat, and for the fact that it was the only Eurovision to take place in a Communist state.

1991: Relax, say the Italians

Twenty-two competing countries rolled into Rome on 4 May 1991, after a last-minute change of venue. That year's Eurovision had originally been booked to occur at Teatro Ariston in Sanremo, where the annual Sanremo Music Festival takes place, however, the invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein's Iraq caused the organisers some security concerns, and a new location in the Italian capital was found. The idea that Saddam might have considered Eurovision a prime target is a little hard to take seriously, but we'll let it slide.

This year saw a few other changes come to pass, namely the entry of the reunified Germany, which had previously competed as West Germany in the Soviet era; the final use of a non-English logo; and the delivery of the entire event in Italian, which caused ruffles as the official languages of the European Broadcasting Union are only English and French. The Italians didn't care about any of this petty bureaucracy though, with hosts Gigliola Cinquetti and Toto Cutugno larking about to the extent that the event overran its time slot. Even the interjections of Frank Naef, the independent scrutineer of the EBU, couldn't persuade them to get a move on.

Still, everyone had fun, and Swedish singer Carola won with a nifty tune called 'Fångad av en stormvind'. British singer Samantha Janus only managed tenth. But this wasn't the end of her career on the small screen, as she became a major TV star on *Eastenders* from 2007–2017.

Having a Ball in 1992

Who doesn't love a Viking? That was the logic of Eurovision 1992's set designers, who created a massive stage in the shape of a Viking ship bow with a dragon poking out of it. Two jolly hosts, Lydia Capolicchio and Harald Treutiger, led the charge at the Malmö Isstadion in Sweden on 9 May, with a record-breaking 23 countries fighting for the prize. Of all the countries that had ever competed, only Monaco and Morocco didn't come out to play: even war-torn Yugoslavia was there in a sense, with Serbia and Montenegro competing under the name 'Federal Republic of Yugoslavia'.

The UK was quietly confident of a win, sending the debonair crooner Michael Ball over to Sweden with a decent tune called 'One Step Out of Time'. However, it had reckoned without Ireland, whose former winner Johnny Logan had penned a song titled 'Why Me?' and signed up a singer called Linda Martin to perform it. On the night Ireland smashed it, with Martin romping home with a 16-point lead over Ball. Aged 40 at the time, Martin remains the oldest woman ever to win Eurovision.

There were some complaints, not unreasonable ones in retrospect, about the fact that the top three songs were all performed in English, the idea being that countries where

Austrian singer Simone warms up for Eurovision 1990 with the glasnost-inspired song 'No Walls Anymore', with Mark Berry on the piano

this was a native language enjoyed an unfair advantage. What was the solution? Answers on a postcard, please.

1993: Room for everyone

Held at Green Glens Arena in Millstreet in Ireland's County Cork, the 1993 contest took place on 15 May, hosted by the television reporter Fionnuala Sweeney. The BBC reporter who covered the event, Nicholas Witchell, asked the owner Noel Duggan in a pre-show interview how he felt about the event taking place "in a cowshed", a spectacular bit of snobbery that Duggan deflected politely. Witchell later apologised for his remark.

The event was the biggest to date, with 25 countries sending teams to compete. This was largely down to the split of Yugoslavia the previous year into six new states, and indeed the European Broadcasting Union asked them to send only three. A qualifying event, Kvalifikacija za Millstreet, was held in Ljubljana, Slovenia, on 3 April, with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia going through.

On the night Ireland won the award, but all eyes were on Bosnia and their singer Fazla (aka Muhamed Fazlagić). To enter the qualifying event in Slovenia, Fazla had been obliged to escape his home country by night, climbing a mountain

"THE EVENT WAS THE BIGGEST TO DATE, WITH 25 COUNTRIES SENDING TEAMS TO COMPETE"

Australian singer Gina G, who represented the UK at Eurovision 1996 with the club anthem 'Ooh, Ahh, Just a Little Bit'

The Norwegian group Secret Garden, comprised of composer Rolf Løvland and violinist Fionnuala Sherry, won Eurovision 1995

© Getty Images, Alamy

and hitching to the Croatian border. His home town of Sarajevo was besieged by Serbian forces at the time, and six other people on the same journey as the singer were shot dead before they reached the border. Despite all this, he made it to Millstreet and competed – a major achievement, even if the hosting country was unstoppable.

Three up for Ireland in 1994

The Point Theatre in Dublin was the venue for Eurovision on 30 April 1994, where television and radio presenters Cynthia Ní Mhurchú and Gerry Ryan welcomed 25 teams of performers: these included seven debutants – Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russia and Slovakia. Perhaps harshly in retrospect, to accommodate the newcomers the EBU had mandated that the seven lowest-placed countries from the 1993 contest didn't qualify. This meant that Eurovision regulars Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Israel, Luxembourg, Slovenia and Turkey didn't get a slot, although this changed slightly when Italy dropped out and Cyprus was reinstated. Notably, Luxembourg – a winning country back in the sixties – has never come back, and who can blame them?

For the first time, countries voted by satellite instead of over the phone, which subsequently led to the rise of colourful spokespeople representing each country, whether seriously or surreally. Hungary took an early lead after the first six votes, but Ireland shot swiftly past them, winning the event by a hefty 60 points ahead of Poland.

The victorious song, 'Rock 'n' Roll Kids', sung by Paul Harrington

"SIX OTHER PEOPLE ON THE SAME JOURNEY AS THE SINGER WERE SHOT DEAD"

Maria Katz, whose stage name is Youddiph, was Russia's first entrant at Eurovision, debuting in 1994

Eurovision 1996 in Oslo was a riot of colour and energy

Below: The French singer Fanny Biascamano rocking the leather look before Eurovision 1992

Competing in the Ein Lied Für Zagreb qualifying round, German singers Mary Preuße and Hape Kerkeling hope for a place in Eurovision 1990

and Charlie McGettigan, wasn't particularly impressive, but the fact that Ireland had won Eurovision three times in a row certainly was. What's more, this was their sixth victory, making them the event's most frequent winners, a position they still retain at the time of writing.

1995: Norway gets nocturnal

Eurovision turned 40 with a bang, held again at the Point Theatre in Dublin, and hosted this time by the television presenter Mary Kennedy. The relegation rules from 1994 remained in effect, which meant that Estonia, Finland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia and Switzerland didn't make it in. In turn, Belgium, Denmark, Israel, Slovenia and Turkey came back, making for a competitive roster at least.

A highlight this year was the four-minute film sequence that opened the event containing four decades' worth of Eurovision gold. In addition, the interval act threw in all the Celtic tropes, including Gregorian chants, the Scottish percussionist Evelyn Glennie, Irish singers Brian Kennedy and Nóirín Ní Riain, members of the Irish folkies Clannad, and even a bunch of Benedictine monks. In comparison, the actual event seemed quite tame, with Norway's song 'Nocturne' by Secret Garden taking the crown despite all the Emerald Isle-themed celebrations. Could Ireland reclaim their throne? Let's see...

A little bit more in '96

The UK had high hopes in the peak year of Britpop, not because it was entering a monobrowed guitar band but because it was fielding a lively chanteuse by the name of Gina G. An Australian DJ who had moved to the Northern Hemisphere and come up with a tune called 'Ooh, Ahh, Just a Little Bit', Ms G did an energetic job of it at the Oslo Spektrum in Norway on 18 May 1996. However, she was no match for the mighty Ireland, who made up for their missed victory in '95 by levelling that year's competition with Eimear Quinn's 'The Voice'.

The event was hosted by television presenter Ingvild Bryn and A-ha singer Morten Harket, the latter probably Norway's biggest star: making the most of the opportunity, Harket performed his new solo single 'Heaven's Not for Saints' as the opening act. The previous relegation rules had been replaced that year with an audio-only qualifying round held two months before the final, the objective being to reduce the number of competitors from 30 to 23.

Another major innovation in 1996 was the introduction of computer-generated visual effects. These were included in the performances and as a way of enhancing the voting segment: we also got to see Ingvild Bryn in a virtual 'blue room' alongside a CGI scoreboard.

Eurovision had entered the digital age at last. Whatever next?

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After some years in the commercial doldrums, victory at Eurovision 1997 evidently tasted sweet for Katrina and the Waves

PLAYING AT 11 IN '97

Eurovision 1997 was a turning point in many ways – and Katrina and the Waves made it an even bigger year for the UK

WORDS **JOEL McIVER**

In many ways, the history of Eurovision can be divided into the pre- and post-1997 contests. In '97, the event welcomed the participation of the viewing public for the first time; it used technology to enable a smoother performance; it embraced the LGBTQ+ audience; and it revamped its qualification system. That's a whole lot of change to manage in a single year, but the organisers pulled it off in fine style.

As with so many nineties Eurovisions, the 3 May 1997 show was held in Ireland, making it the seventh to be hosted by the Emerald Isle. The presenters were TV journalist Carrie Crowley and the boy-band singer Ronan Keating, then at the peak of his career: his group Boyzone performed at the event to the sound of thousands of shrieking Irish teenagers.

You will recall that a new, audio-only competition stage had been introduced in '96 as a way of pre-qualifying the entrants: this had proven to be unpopular and was replaced by a more effective – if also more complex – relegation system. Its goal was to permit each applicant country to compete at least every second year, so to come up with the 25 teams that could be logistically fitted into each Eurovision show the new system looked at previous contests. In 1997, the competing countries were the hosts plus the 24 others that had the highest average points total over the preceding four Eurovisions. Where there was a tie, a country's most recent score determined its place in the list. Got that?

In addition, modern communications technology now permitted the introduction of public voting to Eurovision. Televoting, as it was quaintly called at first, was trialled in five countries that year, effectively as a feasibility study to see if a wider take-up could be practical in 1998. In those countries, the show's viewers were allocated a five-minute slot to call any one of 24 different numbers – one per competing country, excluding their own – to vote for their favourite act. For that five-minute period the numbers were displayed on screen alongside a quick recap of the performances, a commonplace move these days but one that seemed rather futuristic 25 years ago, when the internet was slow and expensive and mobile phones had pretty much the same functions as a landline.

Mime for change

Also that year, performers were permitted to dispense with live music of any kind if they so chose, singing along to a backing track instead. While this raised eyebrows among some purists – Eurovision is, after all, about musicians and music – the move was a godsend for the audio production team, who now had a completely reliable audio source that could be mixed optimally for broadcast. The singers, too, could now focus on their performances without worrying about out-of-tune guitars or intoxicated drummers losing the beat. Still, it was something of a sad day for live music and the start of a process that continues today to the extent that every medium-sized or large gig now features a backing track.

The performances went smoothly, with Ireland, Turkey, Italy and Cyprus doing especially well. Eurovision's first openly LGBTQ+ artist, Iceland's Paul Oscar, also delivered

© Getty Images

a show-stopper with the aid of a group of Madonna-esque backing dancers. However, the victory went to the UK, and specifically to 'Love Shine a Light' by Katrina and the Waves, a half-British, half-American band led by singer Katrina Leskanich.

This was a Eurovision coup for many reasons. Firstly, Katrina and the Waves were an international band, fulfilling Eurovision's inclusive aims to the maximum. Sure, there were a few complaints about the group's North American roots (Leskanich later told the press that she was asked if she could "try and talk like an English person"), but the band had been formed in the UK and had always lived there in their time together, so the whining soon died down.

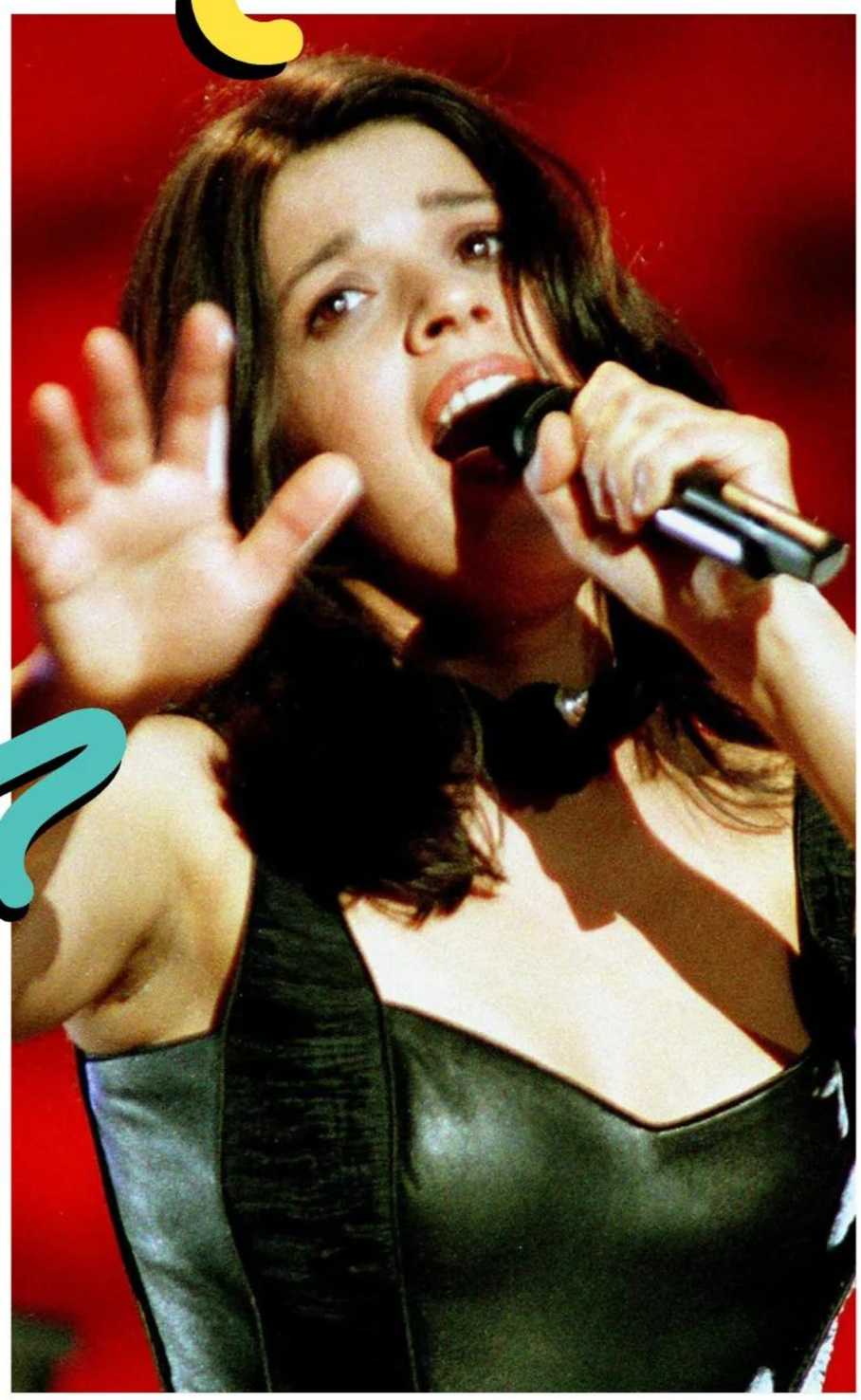
Secondly, Katrina and her band were essentially a guitar group. They didn't look anything like Gina G or Paul Oscar, resembling a post-punk group such as The Cars or Talking Heads. Leskanich herself wasn't a model or a club diva; she was a genuine, working musician, giving credence to the principle that Eurovision should be first and foremost about songs, not faces.

Katrina and the Waves weren't a particularly current band in 1997. They'd started their career with a massive international hit called 'Walking On Sunshine', which is probably playing in your mind now that you've read the title. Still, that song came out in 1985, 12 years in the rear-view mirror when

"LESKANICH WASN'T A MODEL OR A CLUB DIVA; SHE WAS A GENUINE, HARDWORKING MUSICIAN"

The French singer Fanny Biascamano represented her country at the 1997 event after years of competing on TV shows

Left: There's a lot going on in this picture as Paul Oscar, representing Iceland, performs his song 'Minn hinsti dans'



Right: Angola-born singer Celia Lawson, representing Portugal, performs her entry 'Antes do adeus' at Eurovision 1997

The Irish group Boyzone, who played at Eurovision 1997 (from left): Ronan Keating, Shane Lynch, Keith Duffy, Mikey Graham and Stephen Gately

Eurovision 1997 rolled around. That's an entire epoch in pop-music terms, and yet Katrina and the Waves delivered a cool song with an energetic performance and ended up winning the '97 event with a then-record margin of 70 points over second-placed Ireland. There's a lot to think about there.

'Love Shine a Light' rebooted Katrina and the Waves' career, at least briefly, and was released as a single in the UK, rising to Number Three in the charts. The group worked for another year before Leskanich went solo and finally called it a day in 1999, but the lesson of their Eurovision win remains: anyone can compete, and anyone can win.

Eurovision itself was transformed by the 1997 edition. From then on, the viewing public were on board thanks to the success of the televoting system, which went large in 1998. This democratisation and expansion of the votes to the TV audience meant that the winners were no longer determined by the agendas of a small group of jury members. Of course, a lot of communications network providers made a whole chunk of money out of the new system, but that's the price we pay for our involvement – and remember, voting is not mandatory.

The question was: who would you vote for, now that your vote was enabled? This was where the real competition began, the battle to win over the hearts and minds of the watching public.

© Getty Images, Alamy

Dana glides on to the stage at the 64th contest in Tel Aviv, Israel, 2019

"I WANT TO SEND MY CRITICS A MESSAGE OF FORGIVENESS: TRY TO ACCEPT ME. I AM WHAT I AM"

ISRAELI UPSET

Israel's 1998 song signalled a new era of diversity for Eurovision and brought trans rights into the mainstream

WORDS **NEIL CROSSLEY**

Eurovision is no stranger to controversy, and so it proved at the 1998 contest, when Israeli transsexual artist Dana International won the contest in Birmingham with the song 'Diva', written by Yoav Ginai and Svika Pick.

This was the 43rd contest and 25 countries competed, including newcomers Macedonia, which awarded the eight points that proved crucial to ensuring victory for Israel. Following a successful trial in 1997, televoting took place in the majority of countries for the first time at this contest, which was the eighth to be held in the UK.

Dana International was the contest's first trans performer, a development welcomed by many, but not everyone. In the lead-up to the contest many orthodox Jews made their feelings clear about Dana representing Israel with a series of protests on the streets of the Holy Land. There were even death threats from some fanatical factions within the country. Thankfully they proved to be nothing more than the rantings of an idiotic minority with no means of carrying them out and Dana was able to perform safely.

By the time the National Indoor Arena opened its doors on 9 May 1998, anticipation for the contest was high. It would witness a closely fought battle, with Malta and Israel both securing 166 points before Macedonia's voting secured victory for Israel. It was a pivotal moment for diversity within the contest.

Dana International's performance established Eurovision as a safe space for the LGBTQ+ community and took trans rights into the mainstream. As journalist Eve Barlow of the *Guardian* put it in a retrospective in May 2018, Dana International's win "signalled the importance of the fun, free, gregarious culture of Eurovision as an annual LGBTQ+-friendly celebration".

The song itself was a real infectious earworm of a track, with its thick europop beat and an instantly sing-along chorus making it ripe with karaoke potential.

After her win, Dana International addressed her detractors. "My victory proves God is on my side," read her statement. "I want to send my critics a message of forgiveness: try to accept me. I am what I am."

The controversy didn't stop there. After being announced as the winner, Dana International caused a stir by arriving very late at the presentation of the winner's trophy. The delay had been caused by her changing into an extravagant black dress adorned with bird feathers that had been designed by Jean Paul Gaultier.

She had intended to wear the dress during the performance of the song but felt the feathers may cause too much controversy among the viewers. So for the performance she made a last-minute decision to don a sparkling silver dress instead.

One year later, the 44th Eurovision Song Contest in 1999, was something of a watershed event. Twenty three countries took part in Israel's second contest as hosts, with Lithuania returning after a five-year absence. This was the first contest not to feature an orchestra, the result of a cost-cutting exercise, which meant that all entries were accompanied by a backing track for the first time. Twice Eurovision winner Johnny Logan said the move turned the contest into "karaoke".

The language rule was relaxed once again, allowing artists to perform in any language, with most of them choosing English. The contest conjured up a close race between Sweden and Iceland, with Charlotte Nilsson eventually earning Sweden's fourth contest win with 'Take Me to Your Heaven'.

The conclusion of the broadcast featured all of the participants returning to the stage to perform 'Hallelujah', the Israeli winning song from 1979, as a tribute to the victims of the war that was ravaging Kosovo at the time, a conflict that would last from February 1998 until June 1999 and claim over 13,500 lives.

It was a poignant moment and one that highlighted Eurovision's unique role as a unifying force across borders. As the new millennium beckoned, the potency of Eurovision and its enduring appeal seemed assured.

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THE STORY OF EUROVISION

EUROVISION'S BIGGEST HITS

Relive some of the most successful songs ever to grace the Eurovision stage

WORDS **BEE GINGER**

'Nel blu, dipinto di blu'

BY **DOMENICO MODUGNO** 1958

You might not think you know this song, but chances are you have heard it before – probably while dining at your local Frankie and Bennies! Not only did it win two Grammy Awards but it has been covered by stars including the Gipsy Kings and Dean Martin under the title 'Volare'. It's also used in numerous football chants.

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'Rise Like a Phoenix'

BY **CONCHITA WURST 2014**

Making headline news around the world and catapulting Wurst to idol status, this operatic belter of a pop song attracted all sorts of media and political attention. Reaffirming the Eurovision Song Contest's affinity with the LGBTQ+ community, it saw Wurst rightly earn legions of new fans.

"HE WOULD LATER PERFORM AN ACCOUSTIC VERSION FOR THE *EUROPE SHINE A LIGHT* SHOW"

'Heroes'

BY **MÅNS ZELMERLÖW 2015**

Having had previous success at the 2015 Melodifestivalen, Måns Zelmerlöw went on to secure Sweden another deserved victory with his upbeat anthem 'Heroes'. He would later perform an acoustic version for the *Europe Shine a Light* tribute show for frontline and key workers during the COVID-19 pandemic and has since penned many more hits as well as enjoying a successful career in presenting and film.

© Getty Images, Alamy

'Save Your Kisses for Me'

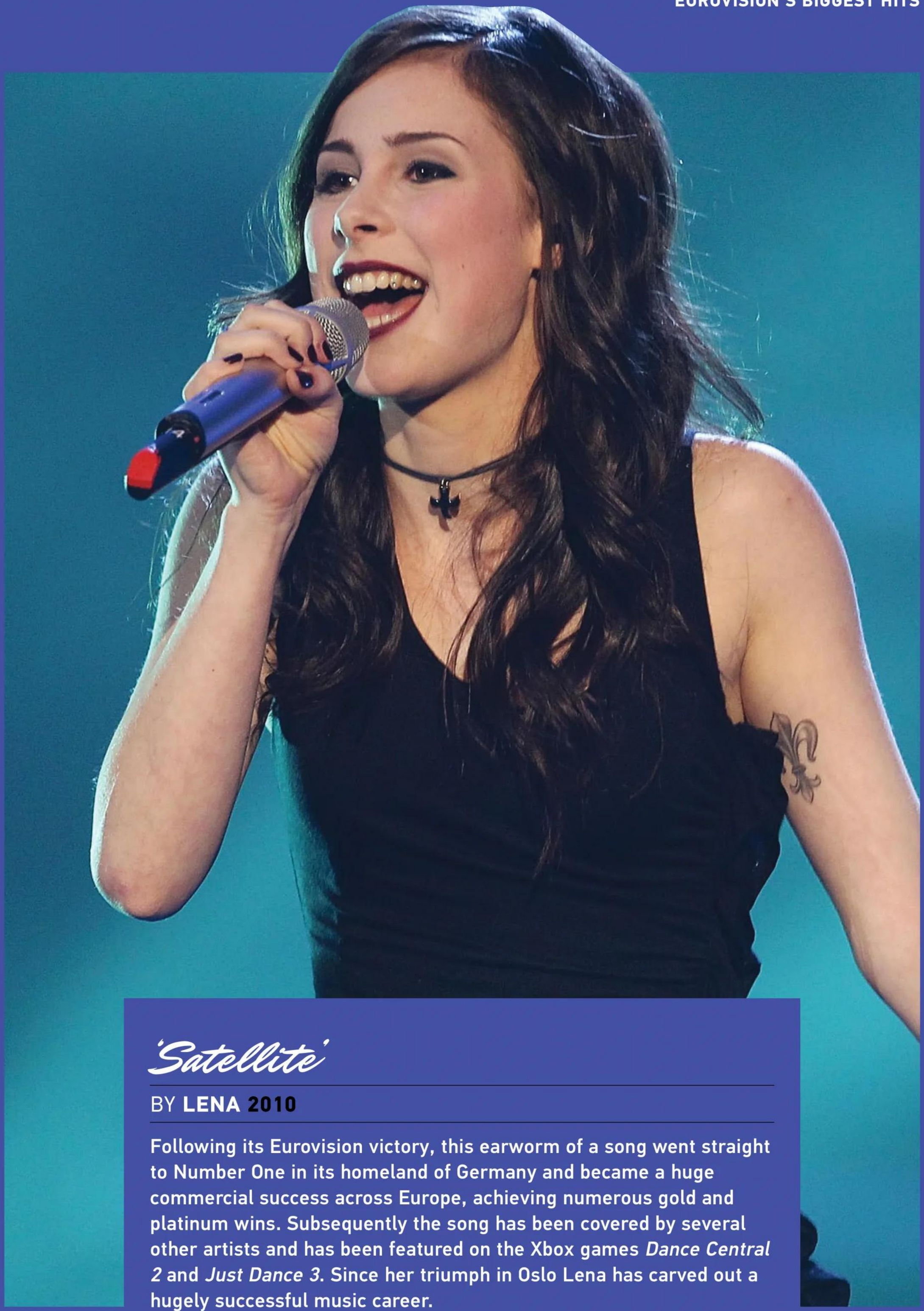
BY **BROTHERHOOD OF MAN** 1976

Not in fact written about leaving behind a lover but instead a three-year-old child, this catchy pop song had huge global success, with a staggering 33 Number-One spots across Europe, Australia and the US. As of 2022 it still held the record for being the biggest-selling Eurovision single in history, with over 5 million record sales.

'Love Shine a Light'

BY **KATRINA AND THE WAVES** 1997

From the band that brought you the iconic song 'Walking on Sunshine', Katrina and The Waves didn't disappoint as winners of the 1997 contest, even beating the Irish to first place. Following Eurovision the band went on to have several disagreements and legal disputes and even looked to replace Katrina at one point before disbanding a few years later. The song, however, remains a Eurovision favourite to this day.



'Satellite'

BY **LENA 2010**

Following its Eurovision victory, this earworm of a song went straight to Number One in its homeland of Germany and became a huge commercial success across Europe, achieving numerous gold and platinum wins. Subsequently the song has been covered by several other artists and has been featured on the Xbox games *Dance Central 2* and *Just Dance 3*. Since her triumph in Oslo Lena has carved out a hugely successful music career.

© Getty Images, Alamy

‘Ooh Aah... Just a Little Bit’

BY **GINA G 1996**

Whether you love it or hate it, you can’t deny it gets people on their feet and dancing. This Eurodance smash hit spent a whopping 27 weeks at the top of the UK singles charts and proved massively popular across Europe, America and in Gina’s homeland of Australia. It was nominated for Best Dance Recording at the Grammys in 1996.

'1944'

BY **JAMALA** 2016

What's Eurovision without a touch of political controversy? Well this emotional number dished it out in spades. The song speaks of a harrowing history and is dedicated to the singer's great grandmother. Not only does she use a duduk (an ancient Armenian woodwind instrument made from apricot wood) in the song but also a range of unique vocal techniques to convey her message. And surely that's what Eurovision is all about?

'Fly on the Wings of Love'

BY **THE OLSON BROTHERS** 2000

Regarded as one of the best Eurovision songs in the history of the competition, 'Fly on the Wings of Love' is memorable for the vocoding effects that were used during the song's final chorus to make it sound robotic. This unique tune saw further success when it was covered by the Spanish dance group XTM, featuring DJ Chucky and Annia, making it an instant club hit across Europe.

© Getty Images, Alamy

'Fairytale'

BY **ALEXANDER RYBAK**

2009

With its catchy chorus and memorable violin, Alexander Rybak's 'Fairytale' has been a favourite with fans for over 14 years now. It recently enjoyed a huge resurgence due to its popularity on social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, which propelled it back into the public consciousness and gained huge streaming numbers (particularly on Spotify) from a new army of listeners.

'Euphoria'

BY **LOREEN** **2012**

So good she's made this list too, in 2012 Loreen gave one of the most impressive vocal performances in the competition's history with some spine-tingling high notes on an infectious Eurodance hit that was not only perfect for Eurovision but went on to set dancefloors alight. It became the most downloaded Eurovision song of all time, gaining platinum status in eight countries and a staggering 17 Number-One spots globally.

'Arcade'

BY **DUNCAN LAURENCE 2019**

Welcoming the Netherlands back into the winner's circle with its first win since 1975, Duncan Laurence wowed the audience with his emotional performance. 'Arcade' is the most streamed Eurovision song of all time, with an incredible 1 billion plays spanning across all streaming platforms. Featured on the *Love Island* series in both the UK and US, in 2020 Duncan recorded a duet of the song with the American singer Fletcher.

© Getty Images, Alamy

“GERMANY, THE UK, FRANCE AND SPAIN WOULD BE AUTOMATICALLY ENTERED FROM NOW ON”

Marie Ortal Malka represented France at Eurovision 2005

A NEW MILLENNIUM

The Y2K bug, 9/11 and the war in the Gulf all failed to stop Eurovision from boldly going into the 2000s and beyond!

WORDS **JOEL McIVER**

2000: A post-millennial party

Held in Stockholm, Sweden, on 13 May 2000, the Eurovision Song Contest entered its second century with something of an economics-based outlook, accepting sponsorship from Microsoft and introducing a new rule regarding an elite class of entrants.

The event, hosted by television presenters Kattis Ahlström and Anders Lundin at the Globe Arena, now specified that the four countries that contributed the most money to Eurovision – Germany, the UK, France and Spain – would be automatically entered from now on, as well as being exempt from the relegation rules. The logic here seemed to be that some of these countries had scored poorly in recent years and that relegation would have been unfair given the amount of money they paid each year.

Twenty-four countries stepped up that year, with their performances broadcast on the internet for the first time – no mean technical feat in the pre-streaming, pre-broadband era. Denmark won with a splendid anthem called 'Fly on the Wings of Love', delivered by the Olsen Brothers, two middle-aged gents. One of them, Jørgen Olsen, was 50 years and 61 days old, making him the event's oldest winner at the time.

Eastern allure in 2001

Shifting the action south to the Parken Stadium in Copenhagen, Denmark, Eurovision 2001 took place on 12 May and was hosted by presenter Natasja Crone Back and actor Søren Pilmark. There was a slight reshuffle among the 23 countries that entered, with Greece returning after a two-year absence due to financial issues, and for certain countries where televoting was technically impractical, an eight-member jury was assembled. As usual given Eurovision's love of rules and regulations, these juries had to be split between people in and out of the music industry and also across a wide age range. Televoting countries also retained a backup jury in case the phone and video networks failed on the night.

Estonia smashed it this year, with their song 'Everybody', performed by Tanel Padar, Dave Benton and 2XL, marking the first Eurovision win by a country from the former Eastern bloc. At 50 years and 101 days old, Benton became (and remains) the oldest ever Eurovision winner. Denmark, Greece, France and Sweden made the top five, while Ireland scored their worst placing in their history at 21st. The UK did slightly better, coming 15th with Lindsey Dracass' 'No Dream Impossible', just one more entry in a long list of mediocre Eurovision performances.

2002: Relegations and Riga

The Saku Suurhall (now the Unibet Arena) in Tallinn, Estonia, resounded with music on the night of 25 May 2002. Hosted by opera singer Annely Peebo and actor Marko Matvere, it was the first Eurovision Song Contest held in a former Soviet republic. There had been some concern that Estonian broadcaster ETV might not be able to handle the event for logistical and budgetary reasons, leading Malta and the Netherlands to suggest their services, but in the end Estonia raised sufficient funds for a star-studded occasion.

A theme ran through the event called A Modern Fairytale, said to be the first such thematic device, although that's open to interpretation. The competing countries did not include Iceland, the Netherlands and Poland, as well as Ireland and Norway, the latter two relegated for the first and only time. Portugal did not participate either, citing broadcast issues: they were replaced by Latvia, who – rather brilliantly – went on to win the event with the song 'I Wanna', performed by Marie N.

It was a night of unexpected results in other ways, with Malta hitting a career-best at second, the UK making up for Eurovision 2000 by coming third, and the popular

Turkish contestant Sertab Erener, the winner of Eurovision 2003, waves to the audience during the event in Riga, Latvia. She Scored 167 points with 'Everyway That I Can'

Singer James Fox, the British entry for Eurovision 2004, is seen here full of pre-show optimism

favourites Denmark placed 24th and last. What the heck was happening?

The UK hits bottom in 2003

Whisper this dread name, lest it come back to haunt us all... Jemini! Yes, 2003 was the year when the United Kingdom received the most severe kicking in history from the massed boots of 25 European countries – and it hadn't even left the European Union yet.

Look, we don't mean to cast shade on Jemini themselves, Chris Crombey and Gemma Abbey. They were two personable, capable singers who clearly couldn't hear their backing track or singers, judging by the fact that their vocals were a semitone out of tune all the way through. It was excruciating, and the laughter of the crowd can't have helped, but the main injustice here came from the mockery that Jemini received for apparently being unable to sing – when they were obviously the victims of an unsympathetic mix. Nul points for the UK, although it did avoid regulation the following year because of the elevated rank it held.

Still, Eurovision 2003 – held at the Skonto Hall in Riga, Latvia, on 24 May – was more fun in other ways. Ukraine participated for the first time, Elton John spoke live from Vienna, and a couple of astronauts said hello from the International Space Station. Oddly, the Belgian song 'Sanomi' was sung by its artist Urban Trad in a made-up language, making it the first entry performed neither in English nor in a country's native language. Turkey won the

Left: Belgian singer Xandee competed at Eurovision 2004 with her song '1 Life'. She's seen here at the qualifying event in the town of Schelle, Belgium

Right: Swedish singer Martin Stenmarck in rehearsals at the Palace of Sports in Kyiv, Ukraine, 15 May 2005

event with 'Everyway That I Can' by Sertab Erener, so hats off to her.

A bigger and better event for '04

Why have one Eurovision day when you can have two? In 2004, a new semi-final day was introduced so that a greater number of countries could take part. A hefty 36 nations took a shot on 12 May, three days before the main event, where 24 competed. Both shows were presented by Turkish actors Korhan Abay and Meltem Cumbul and took place at the Abdi İpekçi Arena in Istanbul.

Although the event was full of innovations like the one above, plus an English-only policy to save time across the expanded voting segment, the hosts kept the nostalgia levels healthy. Cumbul kicked things off with a crowd-pleasing rendition of the old Eurovision favourite 'Volare' – or 'Nel blu dipinto di blu', as no one ever calls it – and ABBA showed up with a new video depicting their history, featuring the late, great Rik Mayall playing the part of their manager.

Ukraine were the winners on only their second Eurovision thanks to the song 'Wild Dances' performed by the singer Ruslana. Because the number of voting countries was higher this year, we witnessed the phenomenon of non-winning songs bagging over 200 points – the top three, in fact. For the first time, the show was released on DVD, a format that seemed pretty cutting-edge at the time, but which – as we now know – would soon be doomed by the rise of streamed TV.

"ABBA SHOWED UP WITH A NEW VIDEO DEPICTING THEIR HISTORY, FEATURING THE LATE RIK MAYALL"

2005: 50 not out

On 19 and 21 May 2005, Eurovision rocked the Palace of Sports in Kyiv, Ukraine, with television presenters Maria Efrosinina and Pavlo Shylko walking us through the semi-final and final.

This year no fewer than 39 countries took part, not remotely bothered by the sound problems that persisted through the first event and which made it difficult to hear some of Norway's entry.

Greece were the winners this time out, with the song 'My Number One', performed by Helena Paparizou, living up to its title. Fair play to Greece: they had been participating in Eurovision for 31 years at this point and 2005 was their very first victory. In their case, persistence certainly paid off.

However, the so-called 'Big Four' countries – France, Germany, Spain and the UK – ended up being the 'Small Four' this time, sinking into the last four places.

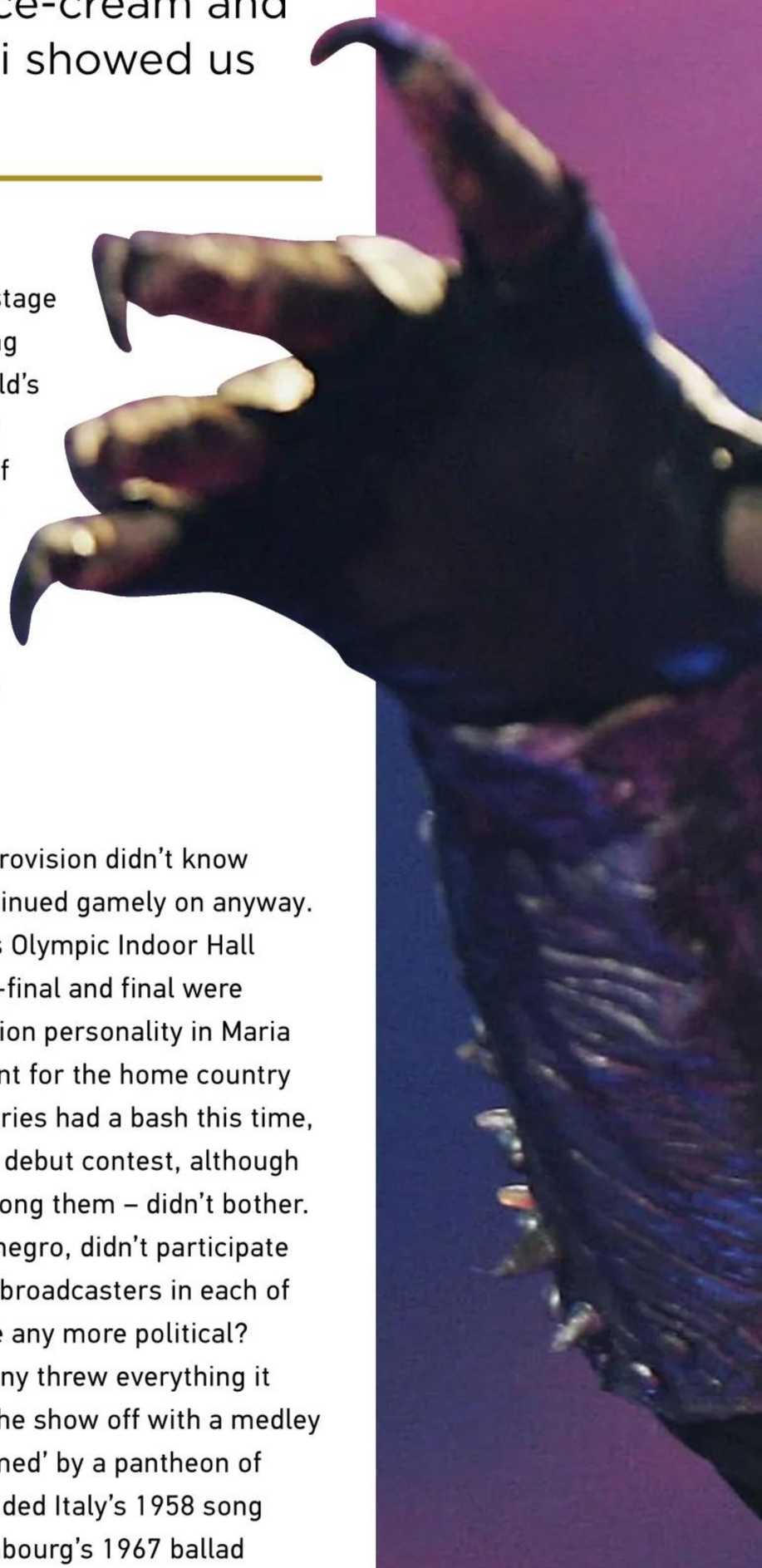
Were all four acts particularly bad this year, or had the rest of Europe decided to teach their overlords a lesson? We will never know, but one thing's for sure, it's fun to speculate about it.

© Getty Images, Alamy

OH LORDI!

Heavy metal and Eurovision used to go together like ice-cream and Marmite – until 2006, that is, when headbangers Lordi showed us the path to righteousness...

WORDS **JOEL McIVER**



"In Finland, where the words 'nul points' are burned into the national psyche," frothed the *Guardian* the month before Eurovision 2006, "they have decided to take radical action and appoint hard-rocking death metal band Lordi as their Eurovision entry for 2006." Meanwhile, the *New York Times* burbled, "The cartoon metalheads sport latex monster masks and spark-spewing instruments and sing about 'the Arockalypse'!"

Now this was exactly what Eurovision needed – an act that actually frightened people. Never mind that Lordi, a quintet from Finland formed by their singer and costume-maker Tomi Petteri Putaansuu, were far from being a death metal band: the word 'death' was enough to make non-metalheads shudder. Lordi weren't really even a standard metal band, making humorous, slightly heavy rock along the lines of Alice Cooper or Kiss.

Monaco's representative Séverine Ferrer performs her paean to everyone's favourite chocolate beverage, 'The Coco Dance', at Eurovision 2006

What mattered was that their stage masks were mildly macabre, along the lines of the average 14 year old's Halloween costume. It was wildly entertaining stuff in the context of Eurovision, though, and when Mr Lordi pressed a secret button and his wobbly PVC 'wings' rose unsteadily into the air, you knew they were going to win – as indeed they did.

Mythical movers

Fifty-one years into its career, Eurovision didn't know what had hit it, but the show continued gamely on anyway. Held on 20 May at the Nikos Galis Olympic Indoor Hall in Athens, Greece, the 2006 semi-final and final were presented by an American television personality in Maria Menounos and a former contestant for the home country Sakis Rouvas. Thirty-seven countries had a bash this time, with Armenia performing at their debut contest, although others – Austria and Hungary among them – didn't bother. Two countries, Serbia and Montenegro, didn't participate because of tensions between the broadcasters in each of those nations. Could this show be any more political?

The Greek broadcasting company threw everything it had into the production, kicking the show off with a medley of former Eurovision hits 'performed' by a pantheon of ancient Greek deities. These included Italy's 1958 song 'Volare' delivered by Zeus, Luxembourg's 1967 ballad 'L'Amour est bleu' sung by Poseidon, the Brotherhood Of Man's 1976 banger 'Save Your Kisses for Me' crooned by Hermes, the 1981 Bucks Fizz anthem 'Making Your Mind Up' executed by Athena and the 1998 dancefloor classic 'Diva' by Dana International knocked out by Aphrodite. Our hosts Menounos and Rouvas gave the UK a third nod by singing the 1997 winner 'Love Shine a Light' by Katrina

“GREECE KICKED OFF THE SHOW WITH A MEDLEY OF HITS PERFORMED BY ANCIENT GREEK DEITIES”

© Alamy, Getty Images

Green day: the group Ich Troje of Poland perform at the dress rehearsal prior to the semi-finals of Eurovision 2006

The Netherlands' group Treble perform their song 'Amambanda' during the Eurovision 2006 semi-final

and the Waves. Not only that, the final event began with a ballet that told the story of the birth of Greece, delivered by a posse of dancers suspended above the stage to introduce the previous year's winner, Helena Paparizou.

Long live rock 'n' roll!

The 2006 show was notable in other ways, too, with the 1,000th Eurovision song delivered by Ireland's Brian Kennedy when he sang 'Every Song is a Cry for Love' in the semi-final. Respect to whichever intern had to count up the number of songs performed over the previous 51 years for that to happen, eh?

Not only that, 2006 was the first year that the first bunch of votes – from one point up to and including seven – immediately appeared on screen when a new voting country came online. This meant that a huge amount of time was saved, not to mention the fact that the weary live audience didn't have to clap quite as often as they had done in previous years. Now, we focused only on the eight-, ten- and 12-point votes – the good stuff.

“FINLAND NOW ENJOYS A REPUTATION FOR CHALLENGING MUSIC, LORDI HAVING GAINED ITS FIRST VICTORY”

Mind you, there was still room for those golden Eurovision technical errors, and the 2006 show boasted quite a few of those. Graphics were overlaid on Maria Menounos at one point (too much retsina in the control room, perhaps?) and some of the scoreboards took ages to load. One spokesman, the Dutch presenter Paul de Leeuw, slowed everything down to a crawl by giving his cellphone number to presenter Rouvas and also announcing the first seven points when there was clearly no need to do so. Finally, Constantinos Christoforou – delivering the Cypriot votes – said hello from “Nicosia, the last divided capital in Europe”, which is open to interpretation, but the Eurovision computer displayed ‘Switzerland’ in error.

While the fate of most Eurovision winners is to disappear from public view after a couple of years, Lordi have cleverly parlayed their 2006 triumph into an enduring career. That said, they’d already had a hit in 2002 with the mildly amusing ‘Would You Love a Monsterman?’, and were three albums in by the time Eurovision came calling four years later. That album, *The Arockalypse* (do you see what they did there?) led to a massive tour of the continent, sensitively called the ‘Bringing Back the Balls to Europe’ tour and kicked off a modern tradition of rock bands playing Eurovision.

Douze points if you can name the ancient Greek deity portrayed by this dancer at Eurovision 2006. (No, we don’t know either)

Twelve studio albums (with another due to be released in May 2023) and a massive boxset later, they’re still at it, although Mr Lordi is 49 as you read this and may well be considering hanging up his wings at some point. His greatest legacy may be that Finland now enjoys a reputation for challenging music, his song having gained them their first Eurovision victory in 45 years of attempts. Lordi were also the first actual band to win since 1997, and as if you didn’t know this already, their little anthem was the first rock song to take the trophy.

In case you’re still thinking that Lordi remain a one-off curio without much approval among Eurovision fans, consider this: ‘Hard Rock Hallelujah’ held the record for the most points ever gained at the event until it was overtaken by ‘Fairytale’ by Alexander Rybak of Norway in 2009. Rock is, indeed, immortal.

© Getty Images, Alamy

THE CHANGING OF THE GUARD

With breakthroughs, upsets and the exit of iconic hosts, 2007 to 2014 were the years that changed Eurovision forever

WORDS **HENRY YATES**

High-definition in Helsinki

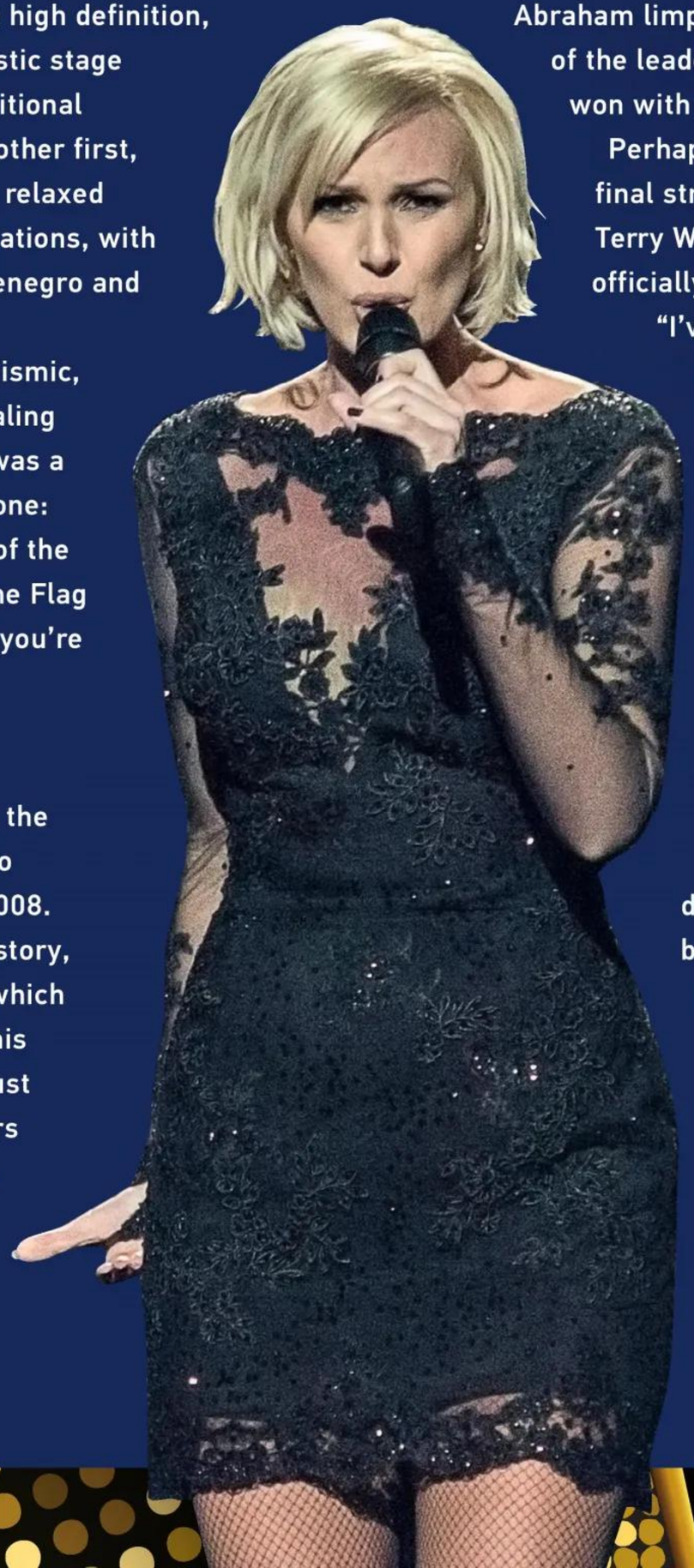
With Finland's headbanger trolls Lordi having brought the trophy home from the previous year's contest in Athens, the Eurovision circus rolled into Helsinki in May 2007 and the eyes of the continent turned on the monolithic 15,000-capacity Hartwall Arena.

In the same year that Apple unveiled its first iPhone, Eurovision also entered the modern age. For the first time the contest was broadcast in high definition, giving pin-sharp views of a futuristic stage fashioned in the shape of the traditional Finnish kantele instrument. In another first, the European Broadcasting Union relaxed entry rules to admit a record 42 nations, with the Czech Republic, Serbia, Montenegro and Georgia all taking the stage.

That new ruling would prove seismic, with Serbia's Marija Šerifović stealing the night with 'Molitva'. But this was a contest where even the losers shone: if you don't smile at the memory of the UK's Scooch performing 'Flying the Flag (For You)' in trolley-dolly outfits, you're not a Eurovision fan.

Sir Terry calls time

The bar had never been higher as the world's greatest singers flocked to Serbia's Belgrade Arena in May 2008. For the first time in Eurovision history, twin semi-finals were held from which just 25 nations would advance. This unprecedented cull would even oust such stalwarts as six-time winners Ireland – whose satirical entry by Dustin The Turkey was plainly lost in translation.



When the dust settled, there were hot favourites among the acts still standing. Most notably, as a bankable star who had worked with Daft Punk, victory seemed a formality for France's Sébastien Tellier with 'Divine'. But Eurovision is nothing if not a stream of curveballs, and as the night played out the Frenchman would be dismissed with just 47 points. Just as dramatic was the UK's collapse, with *X Factor*'s Andy Abraham limping in last, while at the far end of the leaderboard, Russia's Dima Bilan won with 'Believe'.

Perhaps Abraham's drubbing was the final straw for the UK's beloved host Terry Wogan, with the late Irishman officially stepping away that December.

"I've had 35 wonderful years commentating on the Eurovision for radio and television," he said fondly. "From my first, in a small music hall in Dublin, to my last, in the huge arena in Belgrade, it has been nothing but laughter and fun. The silly songs, the spectacle, the grandiose foolishness of it all..."

A national treasure, Wogan's dulcet tones and sharp wit would be missed, as has he been since his passing in 2015. For many in the UK, he was the main reason to tune in.

Rybak breaks records

With Vladimir Putin himself overseeing preparations at

“IRELAND’S SATIRICAL ENTRY DUSTIN THE TURKEY WAS PLAINLY LOST IN TRANSLATION”

Left: Sweden’s Sanna Nielsen sings ‘Undo’

Everyone’s favourite twin singers, Jedward literally hit the high notes during the 2012 rehearsals

© Alamy, Getty Images

Moscow's Olympic Indoor Arena – and a high-tech stage that featured one-third of the world's LED screens – Russia pulled out all the stops for its debut as Eurovision host. As for incoming host Graham Norton, he was mostly there for the hard liquor. "I can't wait to get to Moscow," quipped the Irish comic. "With a combination of cheap vodka and a language barrier, what could possibly go wrong?"

After a few cursed years, the UK had high hopes in Moscow, with ex-Sugababe Jade Ewen gifted the Andrew Lloyd Webber- and Diane Warren-penned 'It's My Time'. Assisted by the new voting system – which gave equal weighting to national juries and the televote – Ewen would finish in a credible fifth place, while banking the nation's highest score since Katrina And The Waves in 1997 (an accolade she held onto until Sam Ryder's success in 2022). But Norway's fiddle-slicing Alexander Rybak was the revelation of the night, finishing on the podium with a megawatt smile and a record-breaking 387 points for 'Fairytale'.

Poor old Scooch gave it their all. In return Europe gave them a meagre 19 points

A cloud over the contest

With the global financial crisis biting hard – and the Czech Republic, Hungary and Montenegro all withdrawing from the contest – the field was noticeably thinned as Eurovision 2010 arrived at Oslo's Telenor Arena. Just as worrying, the airspace-cloaking ash belched by an Icelandic volcano meant many delegations were forced to travel by boat and only just arrived in time. And yet, from these inauspicious omens, a memorable competition emerged.

The official slogan for 2010 was Share The Moment, and there were countless to remember, for better and worse, from the interval's thrilling flash mobs to the reshoot of Spain's performance after Daniel Diges' first attempt at 'Algo pequeñito' was interrupted by infamous stage and pitch invader Jimmy Jump.

Meanwhile, after the grandiosity of the Russian-hosted contest, the elegant simplicity of Lena's winning German entry, 'Satellite', announced that music could still beat pyrotechnics hands down. Just don't mention

Eurovision 2010 to hapless Josh Dubovie, whose UK entry 'That Sounds Good to Me' evidently didn't to European viewers and belly-flopped into last place.

Bring out the big guns

Hosting Eurovision for the first time since 1983, Germany came out fighting, turning the Düsseldorf Arena into a bear pit of home support and once again drafting reigning champion Lena in the hope of back-to-back wins. Yet the path to victory had never looked rockier. One major obstacle was the return of 'Big Five' nation Italy after more than a decade's absence. Another was the UK's superstar boy band Blue, whose 15 million sales suggested the rest of the bill was cannon fodder.

The night didn't play out that way. After a run of good, bad and ugly performances ("The curling tongs have been working overtime," joked Graham Norton as Hungary's heavily coiffed Kati Wolf took the stage), the scoreboard made surprising reading. While Italy's return was vindicated by the second-place success of Raphael Gualazzi with 'Madness of Love', Lena could only manage 107 points for 'Taken by a Stranger', while Azerbaijan secured its first-ever Eurovision victory with Ell and Nikki's 'Running Scared'.

"BLUE'S 15 MILLION SALES SUGGESTED THE REST OF THE BILL WAS CANNON FODDER"

Right: Austria's 'bearded man' Conchita Wurst relishes victory in 2014

Below: Krista Siegfrids locks lips with a backing dancer during the second semi-final

© Getty Images, Alamy

As for Blue, the contest's hot tip fizzled like a damp firework, with 'I Can' finishing 11th. "Eurovision wasn't even about winning for us," shrugged Simon Webbe. "It was about representing our country."

Euphoria for Sweden

As the contest kicked off in its most easterly location ever – Baku Crystal Hall in Azerbaijan – the bright young things rubbed shoulders with the old guard.

At 76, Engelbert Humperdinck was the UK's oldest-ever participant. But even his vintage paled in comparison to the ethno-pop grandmothers of Russia's Buranovskiye Babushki, whose combined age totalled more than 500.

'Light Your Fire!' commanded the official slogan, and there were certainly moments when Eurovision ignited in Baku. Ireland's shaving brush-quiffed twins Jedward ran riot with sixth-place 'Waterline' (an improvement on their previous year's #8 ranking for 'Lipstick').

Albania's Rona Nishliu hit one of the highest notes in the contest's history on 'Suus'. "She can do extraordinary things with her voice," warned Graham Norton. "If you've got dogs or small children in the room, you might want to put them out of earshot."

But not for the first time, there was no stopping Sweden, as Loreen's ghostly club banger 'Euphoria' not only won by a landslide but segued into the real-world charts, reaching UK#3.

"IF YOU'VE GOT DOGS OR SMALL CHILDREN IN THE ROOM, YOU MIGHT WANT TO PUT THEM OUT OF EARSHOT"

Below: Russia laps up the applause in the wake of Diman Bilan's 2008 win with 'Believe'

All rise: Chart toppers Blue earned a respectable 100 points but couldn't secure the prize

Not so Bonnie for the UK

Hosting for the first time in 13 years, nobody could blame Sweden for dining out on past glories, with the festivities kicking off with a performance of 'We Write the Story' (co-authored by ABBA's Björn Ulvaeus and Benny Andersson, plus Scandinavian DJ Avicii). Yet alongside the blue-and-yellow branding, this contest was envisaged as one of the most inclusive yet, with the official tagline 'We Are One' and a butterfly logo to represent music's ripple effect.

The history books report that Emmelie de Forest triumphed for Denmark with the wistful 'Only Teardrops', but the night offered a fistful of memorable moments, not least the clinch between Finland's Krista Siegfrids and her backing dancer that saw Graham Norton remind the audience this was the modern age: "If two girls kissing offends you, you need to grow up."

As for the UK, Bonnie Tyler surely deserved better than 15th for a lung-flaying performance of 'Believe in Me' that saw the Welsh belter rise to the rafters on an elevating stage. "It didn't end the way I wanted it to," she reflected. "But it wasn't for the want of trying."

When the Wurst is the best

In May 2014, all eyes were on a gentrified former shipyard in the Danish capital, as Copenhagen's B&W Hallerne hosted 37 countries for the sing-off to end them all. If the contest's hashtag slogan (#JoinUs) reflected the rise of social media, then the zeitgeist-riding vibe gathered pace inside the complex, with cutting-edge lights, cameras and LED backwall all controlled via computer. Eurovision, it seemed, had embraced modernity.

But when the night began, in the steady hands of Denmark's own *Borgen* star Pilou Asbæk as host, it was the most human performances that won out. Sweden's Sanna Nielsen claimed her place on the podium with the open-hearted piano ballad 'Undo'. The Common Linnets banked second place for the Netherlands with the tears and whisky of their country-flavoured 'Calm After the Storm'. But the year belonged to Austria's Conchita Wurst, the flamboyant drag queen whose 'Rise Like a Phoenix' sounded like a great lost Bond theme. As the 34-year-old reflected at last year's competition in Turin, "Winning Eurovision changed everything in my life..."

© Getty Images, Alamy

01

02

1. Previous winner Conchita Wurst was the opening act for Eurovision's 60th birthday

2. Guy Sebastian represented Australia's first foray into the world of the Eurovision Song Contest

3. Måns Zelmerlöw, winner of the 60th Eurovision Song Contest, hugs previous winner Conchita Wurst as he accepts the award for Sweden

4. The final was held at Wiener Stadthalle in Vienna, Austria

5. Sweden's entry was 'Heroes' by Måns Zelmerlöw, who was a previous contestant on the singing contest Swedish Idol

6. Italian operatic pop trio Il Volo were firm favourites to win on the night

03

04

05

06

A BAND DOWN UNDER

To celebrate the diamond anniversary of the contest, a surprise participant said "G'day" for the first time

WORDS **CARRIE MOK**

For a contest that has 60 years of history, you'd be forgiven for thinking that there were no more surprises to come. And yet Europe's most celebrated song competition caught its audience off guard in 2015 with the exciting announcement that Australia would participate in Eurovision for the first time. It wasn't the first time that a country outside of Europe has participated in the song contest, however, as Morocco previously entered in 1980. But how did we get here?

Since 1983, Eurovision has been a popular mainstay on Australian TV. It was so popular in fact, that from 2010-2014 Australian broadcaster SBS allowed its audience to vote for their favourite songs each year (though the votes would have no impact on the actual competition). As part of the 60th anniversary of Eurovision, Australia was granted a special one-off entry to the contest. To prevent diminishing the entries of the other countries, Australia was given a direct entry straight into the final with the caveat that should Australia win on the evening, Eurovision would not be hosted in the Southern Hemisphere but instead be hosted in Europe with another country acting as co-host.

With Austria winning the 59th contest with the song 'Rise Like A Phoenix' by Conchita Wurst, the Wiener Stadthalle in Vienna was chosen as the venue. A new logo celebrating Eurovision's 60th birthday was also revealed as 39 countries announced their participation. 'Building Bridges' was the theme of the year, and Conchita Wurst opened the 60th contest performing the song 'Building Bridges' to a room of 16,000 audience members.

There were several stand-out songs at the 60th show: 'Rhythm Inside' from Belgium's Loïc Nottet was a catchy hip-hop number, while operatic Italian trio Il Volo and their hit 'Grande Amore' was a popular favourite, winning the televote. But it was Sweden's Måns Zelmerlöw and the dance pop number 'Heroes' that landed the number-one spot with a combined 365 points from jury and televoting.

"AUSTRALIAN BROADCASTER SBS ALLOWED ITS AUDIENCE TO VOTE FOR THEIR FAVOURITE SONGS"

A bonza performance

Though the 'Big Five' (France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom) get an automatic entry in the final, the performances on the night of some of its members left a lot to be desired. The UK's electro swing outfit Electro Velvet only achieved five combined points with 'Still in Love with You', while France and Lisa Angell's 'N'oubliez Pas' achieved only four combined points. Germany and 'Black Smoke' by Ann Sophie was awarded the famous 'nil point', coming joint last place with The Makemakes and 'I Am Yours' from Austria.

As Ukraine did not participate in the contest that year due to financial and political complications caused by the Russo-Ukrainian War, loud boos could be heard whenever Russia was mentioned or when points were awarded to the country. Having anticipated these reactions, Eurovision organisers had installed 'anti-booing' technology that was then used for the first time in the contest's history.

Australia, the special guests of the evening, ended up fifth with Guy Sebastian's 'Tonight Again'. With the success of the country's entry appearing so highly on the final ranking on the night, Australia was invited once again in the following year to participate. This time, though, they would not get an automatic qualification for the final and would have to fight for their place in future competitions.

© Getty Images

THE 10 WACKIEST EUROVISION PERFORMANCES

Pirates! Grannies! Gorillas! Here are the ten Eurovision entries that made us drop the remote

WORDS **HENRY YATES**

Grandmother Russia

BY **BURANOVSKIYE BABUSHKI 2012**

Mewling like feral cats while manning a traditional bread oven, the head-scarved Russian grandmothers rode the sympathy vote all the way to second place, but the ever-snarky Graham Norton was not impressed. “It’s an unusual Eurovision this year. There are lots of songs that are really quite good and brilliantly sung. This is not one of those...”

© Getty Images, Alamy

Talking turkey

BY **DUSTIN THE TURKEY** **2008**

There's not enough Guinness in the world to make a tone-deaf puppet fowl seem like a good idea, but Ireland's Dustin the Turkey had his 15 minutes of fame in Belgrade, spinning DJ decks and gobbling 'satirical' lyrics that apologised for Riverdance and Terry Wogan's wig. No surprise, the bird was cooked and carved by judges in the semi-finals.

The tinfoil hat brigade

BY **VERKA SERDUCHKA** **2007**

There's a high bar to be declared Ukraine's weirdest-ever Eurovision entry (the Eastern nation having once presented a man in a hamster wheel as its cultural ambassador), but drag queen Verka Serduchka sailed over it in 2007, performing this accordion-driven oompah banger in a tinfoil outfit that evoked Robocop's camp cousin.

Win or bust

BY **DONATAN AND CLEO 2014**

Part rap-pop banger, part farmyard masterclass, the Poles' 'We Are Slavic' paired its beats with a cleavage-heavy, butter-churning dance routine. Meanwhile, Norton tried his best to find a positive spin on the lyrics. "'We are Slavic girls, we know how to use our charming beauty, now shake what your mama gave you'," he translated, deadpan. "It's essentially a feminist anthem."

© Getty Images, Alamy

A buccaneering beat

BY **PIRATES OF THE SEA 2008**

You can see the logic: with the *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise at its peak, all things ooh-argh seemed viable. But with their disturbed grins, silk pantaloons and wobbly plastic swords, Latvia's risible buccaneers seemed like they were on day release.

We aren't the winners

BY **LT UNITED 2006**

Dressed like the last stragglers at the bar after an accountancy conference, the Lithuanians presumably hoped their caveman chant would become a self-fulfilling prophecy ('We are the winners of Eurovision'). Instead, viewers read it as blowhard arrogance and sent LT United crashing to sixth place (which doesn't have nearly such a good ring to it).

Epic sax

BY **SUNSTROKE PROJECT & OLIA TIRA 2010**

Moldova has since become a byword for Eurovision madness, but it all started with this joyously daft performance, which saw a neon-lit violin player spinning on the spot and Sergey Stepanov's groin-thrusting saxophone solo become an instant meme.

© Getty Images; Alamy

Golf and gas

BY **SÉBASTIEN TELLIER** **2008**

Odd enough that France's entry arrived onstage in a Tricolour-emblazoned golf buggy while a gang of bearded doo-wop girls trilled behind him. More unfathomable still that halfway through 'Divine', Tellier began huffing on a beach ball of helium to hit the high notes, like a Gallic Alvin the Chipmunk.

Mane distraction

BY **DIHAJ** **2017**

Actually, Dihaj's 'Skeletons' wasn't bad: a moody electro-tinged ghost song that prickled your neck hair. But it was hard to keep your attention on singer Diana Hajiyeva when she was stood next to a man up a stepladder wearing a black rubber horse mask, like an escapee from a seriously freaky sex dungeon.

Italy goes absolutely ape

BY **FRANCESCO GABBANI 2017**

Francesco Gabbani's entry was standard-issue europop until the midpoint, when the Italian crooner inexplicably dropped to his knees to serenade what appeared to be the gorilla from the Cadbury's advert fallen on hard times. "If you're going to get someone to dress as a gorilla, at least get a decent outfit," sighed Norton. "That looks like a couple of old car seats sewn together."

© Getty Images, Alamy

CONFLICTS AND CANCELLATION

From wars to a pandemic and the contest's first cancellation, 2016–2020 was an unforgettable period in Eurovision's history

WORDS **CARRIE MOK**

With Eurovision's special 60th birthday celebrations fully concluded, the 61st Eurovision Song Contest was in full swing. Returning to the Globe Arena in Stockholm (a venue that had previously been home to Eurovision in 2000), 2016's contest featured a performance from global popstar Justin Timberlake and was also the first to be broadcast in the United States. After a new voting system was put in place where only the juries' 12 points are announced live by a spokesperson, Ukraine was triumphant with Jamala and the song '1944'.

With that, the next instalment of the competition was held in Kyiv. With tensions running high since the start of the Russo-Ukrainian War in 2014, Russia withdrew from Eurovision after its representative was banned from Ukraine having travelled directly from Russia to Crimea: an illegal act under Ukrainian law. Portuguese singer Salvador Sobral took home the trophy on the night with the song 'Amar Pelos Dois'. A victory for Portugal, it was the country's first Eurovision win in 53 years and put an end to the longest winless run by a country in the contest's history.

The next year would be another record-breaking contest. As Lisbon took the reins as host city for Portugal, the country also selected four presenters on the night, marking the first time that four hosts would be used in the contest's history. Israel was the champion of the 63rd Song Contest with Netta's performance of the song 'Toy'.

"THE DUTCH WERE READY TO TAKE ON THE MANTLE OF HOST COUNTRY, BUT FATE HAD OTHER PLANS..."

The world's favourite musical extravaganza was forced to go online in 2020 as COVID-19 ravaged the planet

Going viral

Skipping forward 12 months to 2019, Eurovision was to be held in Tel Aviv. The issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was a contested topic throughout the year, with demonstrations, calls for a boycott and public backing of the competition all in the zeitgeist at the time. The competition was ultimately still held in Israel, though acts including Madonna (who performed during the interval) and Icelandic entrant Hatari chose to make political statements during the live broadcast. With the Netherlands and their entrant Duncan Lawrence winning the ultimate prize, the Dutch were ready to take on the mantle of host country for Eurovision for the 65th edition, but fate had other plans...

As the bells rang in the new year in 2020, a virus was quietly sweeping its way around the world. Dubbed COVID-19, it led to millions of deaths, food shortages, lockdowns, quarantines and travel restrictions in the immediate affecting countries – but time was running short, and the virus was spreading quickly. With the contest due to begin in May that year, the Eurovision Committee had to act swiftly. In March 2020, the European Union banned incoming visitors. The Dutch Government banned events with over 100 attendees and the 65th Eurovision Song Contest was also announced as cancelled shortly thereafter. Unfortunately, according to Eurovision rules, the entrants for 2020 would not be eligible for the following year's contest were it to be held. Instead, Eurovision produced special one-off programmes on YouTube that showcased all of the songs that would have competed that year and also featured planned and previous entrants and winners performing home concerts. The entrants also performed a special rendition of 'Love Shine a Light' by Katrina and the Waves, which won Eurovision for the UK in 1997.

© Alamy, Getty Images

’SKIN DEEP

As if having a Eurovision during a global pandemic wasn’t weird enough, the 2021 show was turned inside out by a band of Italian goths...

WORDS **JOEL McIVER**

When most of us reach the age of 65, we’re happy to enjoy a quiet life. No alarms and no surprises, please, as Radiohead once put it – but that wasn’t the case with dear old Eurovision. Sixty-five years into the venerable Song Contest, all expectations were unseated by the mighty Måneskin, an Italian rock band with an unusual – but very cool – look and sound. (And yes, doesn’t that little circle over the A make you worry how to say the name? Never fear, it’s pronounced ‘mor-neh-skin’ and means ‘moonshine’ in Danish.)

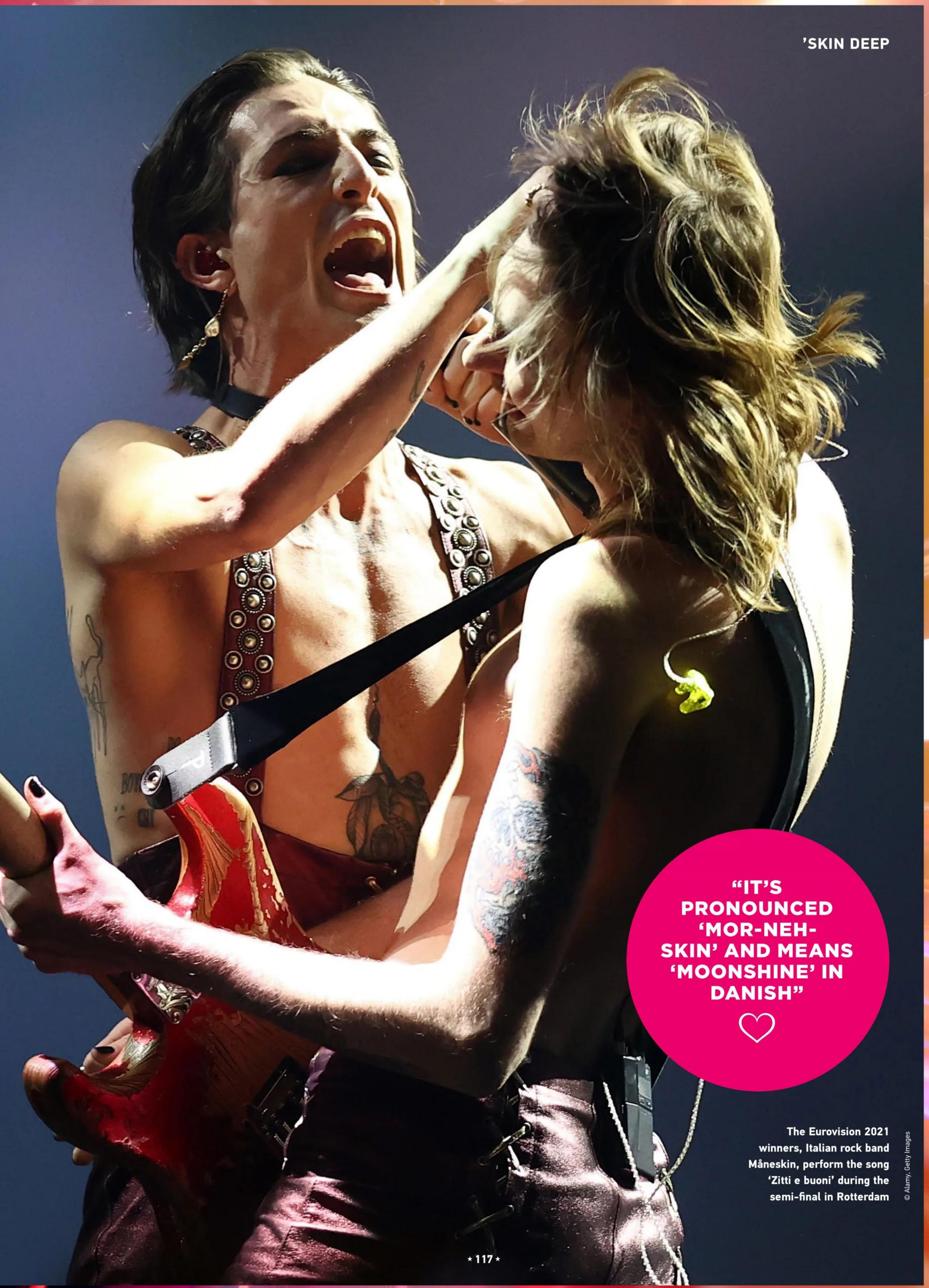
What’s more, the fact that Eurovision 2021 took place in any form whatsoever was pretty much miraculous. The previous year’s event, scheduled to be held on 16 May 2020 in Rotterdam, Netherlands, had been cancelled in March that year as the coronavirus swept through Europe. As you’ll recall, a widespread vaccine didn’t become available until December 2020, so any form of large-scale public gathering was difficult to imagine, let alone organise.

Surinamese singer-songwriter Jeangu Macrooy (left), representing the Netherlands, sings ‘Birth of a New Age’ in Rotterdam on 15 May 2021

A variety of scenarios were put together for a potential 2021 event, and by April it had become apparent that a physical show could happen as long as everybody who attended was non-infectious. The Dutch Government approved a series of six rehearsal events plus two semi-finals and the final itself, with an audience of 3,500 people permitted to attend each one as long as they could prove their negative COVID status.

Four presenters were assigned to Eurovision 2021: TV personalities and singers Chantal Janzen, Edsilia Rombley and Jan Smit, and a Youtuber and make-up artist called Nikkie de Jager. The two semi-finals went off without a hitch on 18 and 20 May, and the final was scheduled for the 22nd. Still, the event had to bring in its boundaries a little for safety, and there was no opening ceremony or EuroClub, while the Eurovision Village was a fairly dull online option rather than the usual in-person extravaganza.

It wasn’t clear whether this was connected to the pandemic conditions or not, but Eurovision 2021 allowed competing teams to use pre-recorded backing vocals for the first time, when these had previously been delivered live. Live backing vocals were still permitted, or a combination of either, and the lead vocal still had to be fully live – which was just as well, or the contest would have been reduced to a bunch of dancers miming along to an audio file.



"IT'S PRONOUNCED 'MOR-NEH-SKIN' AND MEANS 'MOONSHINE' IN DANISH"

The Eurovision 2021 winners, Italian rock band Måneskin, perform the song 'Zitti e buoni' during the semi-final in Rotterdam

© Alamy, Getty Images

Maltese band Destiny perform the song ‘Je me casse’ in the second rehearsal in Rotterdam on 13 May 2021

Cypriots carry placards as they demonstrate in Nicosia on 6 March 2021 to protest against the Eurovision entry ‘El Diablo’ by Greek singer Elena Tsagrinou

Russian-Tajik singer and songwriter Manizha sings during the second rehearsal of the first semi-final of Eurovision 2021

Daoi and Gagnamagnio from Iceland perform on stage with the song '10 Years' at Eurovision 2021

Another new measure allowed countries to compete virtually if, for example, a performer was quarantined on arrival in the Netherlands: this was the submission of a fully pre-recorded performance of each song in its entirety, prepared in competitors' home countries beforehand. These recordings had to be done in real time, with no edits to the vocals or instruments after a session, as laid out in a set of guidelines designed to make the competition fair.

Shut up and behave

Of the 39 countries that participated in Eurovision 2021, 26 had been lined up to compete in the cancelled event the previous year. As per the usual rules, the songs entered in 2021 had to be replaced by new ones for '22. Three countries did not compete for different reasons: Australia because it failed to qualify; Armenia because it was suffering from the effects of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020, during which it lost territory to Azerbaijan; and Belarus because a violation of the rules led to its disqualification.

There was a lot of negativity that year, to the extent that no fewer than four countries received zero points: Germany, Spain, the host country the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. The UK fared particularly badly this time out, receiving no points from either the juries or the voting public. Their singer, a friendly chap called James Newman, did what he could with his slightly mundane song, 'Embers', but it's possible that his performance had little to do with the punishment meted out to his country.

Speculation was rife that Europe was in fact making its collective opinion felt about the UK's withdrawal from the European Union, which had taken place on 31 January 2020 after four years of painful negotiations. The *Guardian* pondered, "Pretty much every country may have had a reason to begrudge the UK. Perhaps EU nations have not forgiven us for Brexit," although other publications scoffed at the idea. "Can we really say that the rest of Europe were punishing us for Brexit?" doubted the *Spectator*, while the *Mirror* quoted the Eurovision expert Paul Jordan, who declared, "Spain haven't won since 1969. They're not moaning about being hated. It's arrogant to assume voters care about Brexit or Boris Johnson."

"FOUR COUNTRIES RECEIVED ZERO POINTS: GERMANY, SPAIN, THE NETHERLANDS AND THE UK"

On a more positive note, we witnessed a marvellous performance by Måneskin, who sailed to victory with their song 'Zitti e buoni', a chunk of futuristic rock. The group – Damiano David, Ethan Torchio, Thomas Raggi and Victoria De Angelis – played the role of surly headbangers to the max, refusing to smile for the cameras and posing for photoshoots with pale insouciance.

Eurovision's viewing figures that year included seven per cent more young people aged 15 to 24, official figures revealed, probably because they were stuck at home and obliged to watch TV with their parents. This in turn may have enabled Måneskin's success: no one is more likely to vote for a band of annoyed-looking youths than an audience of genuinely annoyed youths.

Like Lordi before them, Måneskin have gone on to enjoy a successful post-Eurovision career, gaining 34 platinum and seven gold certifications in Italy, and snagging a nomination in the Best New Artist category at the 2023 Grammy Awards. They've played on American TV shows hosted by Jimmy Fallon and Ellen DeGeneres; they've performed on *Saturday Night Live*; and their songs have apparently been streamed 4 billion times.

When a euphoric Damiano David picked up the Eurovision trophy after his band's victory had been confirmed, he shouted into the microphone, "We just want to say to the whole of Europe, to the whole world, rock and roll never dies!" Måneskin's remarkable success to date proves that he's absolutely right.

© Getty Images, Alamy

RYDER ON THE STORM

Eurovision 2022 saw the arrival of a bona fide star in Sam Ryder amid political tensions and unexpected surprises

WORDS **JOEL McIVER**

“ALL EYES WERE ON THE UKRAINIAN ENTRY FOR OBVIOUS REASONS”

Hitting number two in the UK, ‘Space Man’ is the highest-charting UK Eurovision entry since Gina G’s ‘Ooh, Aah… Just a Little Bit’ in 1996

“When you look back in time, you see that the Eurovision Song Contest is like a logbook of what has happened in Europe,” said Eurovision’s executive supervisor Martin Österdahl on BBC Radio 4 in December 2022. “But, also, what is the kind of mood and sentiment of Europe, and what is the social context of Europe at the time. When we say we are not political, what we always should stand up for are the basic and ultimate values of democracy.”

This statement explains a lot, not least why Russia was banned from competing in the 2022 Eurovision after its invasion of Ukraine in February that year. We felt sorry for Russia’s excellent musicians, of course, but a statement had to be made, and Eurovision stepped up and made it.

Forty countries competed, with the event held at the Pala Alpitour in Turin, Italy: the two semi-finals occurred on 10 and 12 May, with the final on the 14th. TV presenter Alessandro Cattelan, singer Laura Pausini and the British singer Mika hosted the events. All eyes were on the Ukrainian entry for obvious reasons, but it then emerged that they had endured a troubled run-up to the contest.

Ukraine had originally lined up a singer called Alina Pash to represent the country in 2022, but she was replaced after a controversy before the event. The country’s internal rules forbade anyone from competing who had performed in Russia, or entered the Crimea, since 2014. It was alleged that Pash had done so, and an investigation dragged on for some time before the allegations were proven correct. Her replacement was Kalush Orchestra, themselves no strangers to controversy: their singer Oleh Psiuk had accused his country’s Eurovision selectors of falsifying results in a qualifying round and threatened to address this in court.

Still, all of this hot air soon dispersed, and Kalush Orchestra won Eurovision 2022 with consummate ease, delivering their song ‘Stefania’ on an extravagant stage nicknamed ‘The Sun Within’, alongside a real, working waterfall. The four performers – Psiuk plus Ihor

Loreen, representing Sweden, became only the second person to win Eurovision twice on on 13 May 2023

"LOREEN'S THUMPING CLUB ANTHEM 'TATTOO' WAS THE WINNER, BAGGING 583 POINTS"

Didenchuk, Tymofii Muzychuk and Vitalii Duzhyk – received a massive 439 points from the televoters, the most from that voting segment to date. Of the 161 million viewers (a reduced number due to Russia's exclusion), 18 million watched the contest on YouTube and TikTok.

Britain bounces back

Eurovision 2022 was also notable for the arrival of a brand-new British competitor named Sam Ryder, a charismatic chap with a phenomenal vocal range. Born in Essex in 1989, Ryder had built a reputation since 2020 by posting cover versions of songs to TikTok, but he was more than just yet another social-media sensation, having been a working musician for many years. He'd formed his first band, The Morning After, at the age of 16 after being inspired to learn the guitar by none other than Finnish Eurovision 2006 winners Lordi before joining a Canadian rock band called Blessed By A Broken Heart.

Ryder's song, a super-catchy anthem called 'Space Man', came second at Eurovision 2022, giving the UK a record-breaking 16th finish in second place. His album, *There's Nothing But Space, Man!*, was released shortly after the event and debuted at the top of the UK charts. He played 'Space Man' at Queen Elizabeth's Platinum Jubilee concert in June and received a Best New Artist nomination at the 2023 Brit Awards, becoming the first Eurovision act to gain the attention of the Brits in this category.

Along the way he performed alongside members of Queen at a tribute concert for Foo Fighters drummer Taylor Hawkins at London's Wembley Stadium, sang at the Royal Variety Show, and played a 31 December show called Sam Ryder Rocks New Year's Eve. It's safe to say that Eurovision has been good for Ryder.

Dizzy with excitement

By the end of 2022 plans were well in hand for Eurovision 2023. Russia was (and remains) at war with Ukraine and was not invited back. For the same reason, the 2022 winners were unable to host the show despite the Ukrainian broadcaster UA:PBC stating its desire to do so, hoping that the safety of the visiting teams would be assured. But the European Broadcasting Union could not be convinced and suggested the UK was a better option. On 7 October, Liverpool was revealed as the host city, with the 11,000-capacity M&S Bank Arena chosen as the venue.

The final was held on 13 May, with the show's famous heart-centred design incorporating the Ukrainian flag as a gesture of solidarity for the beleaguered country. As for the UK, its hopes of winning a first Eurovision crown since 1997 rested on the shoulders of Londoner Mae Muller and her catchy hit 'I Wrote a Song'. The first UK entry to debut inside the Top 40 (coming in at an impressive 32) in ten years, pundits and fans alike were understandably optimistic, so it came as quite the surprise when she finished second to last with a meagre 24 points, with Germany propping up the table on just 18 points.

The UK expects: Olly Alexander will carry British hopes in Malmö

Some questioned the staging of Muller's performance, arguing that she – along with her superb vocals – were lost in a flurry of dazzling video installations. "I think it's an excellent song, but the staging wasn't great," said Ken Olausson of Sweden's *QX* magazine. "The whole feeling of female power that's in the song when you hear it on the radio, it wasn't on stage. I don't know if they lost her in a lot of props, but the power didn't come through."

Ultimately, the night – which was watched by 162 million viewers on TV and YouTube and featured Catherine, Princess of Wales, playing the piano during the opening sequence – belonged to Sweden's Loreen. Becoming just the second person ever to win the contest twice, her thumping club anthem 'Tattoo' was the runaway winner, bagging 583 points, 57 more than Finland's Käärijä, who finished in second place and was accurately described as "a dancing Brussels sprout" by Graham Norton.

As a result of Loreen securing Sweden's seventh Eurovision triumph (tying it with Ireland) the 68th contest will be hosted in Malmö on 11 May, and all British eyes will be on former Years & Years frontman Olly Alexander and his electro song 'Dizzy'. He will be up against some stiff competition, with the bookies tipping Croatia's pasta-loving producer Baby Lasagna to steal the crown with his utterly wacky entry, 'Rim Tim Tagi Dim', which features such profound lyrics as "Bye Mom, Bye Dad / Meow, cat, please meow back." Quite.

Whether Alexander will put Europe in a spin and become the first male British solo artist to taste Eurovision glory remains to be seen, but one thing is for sure – it's going to be fun finding out. Over to you, Malmö.

© Getty Images, Alamy

Meme-tastic MUSIC

A popularity contest as well as a music showdown, Eurovision has certainly made its mark on internet history...

WORDS **ELLIE BROWN**

Eurovision gets meta – the Epic Sax Guy of 2010 made a triumphant return to the stage in 2017, where his slick moves once again stole the show

For every Eurovision competitor rolling out the red carpet for one of its finest singers, there's another trying to win a different competition altogether: to be the most talked-about. Perhaps there's a wacky gimmick. An awkward dance move. A bum note. Maybe even a wolf with a banana (thanks, Norway 2022).

Internet history

The fact Eurovision draws in hundreds of millions of viewers every year – many of them with a smartphone on standby – means that for one week the contest takes over social media. Instagram is filled with new GIFs, there are opinionated play-by-plays on Facebook, and '#eurovision' shoots to the top of Twitter's trending list. Each year adds new acts to the Eurovision memes canon, but even before the birth of the internet Eurovision spawned legendary acts remembered for their unusual staging and costumes as well as their songs. Even the most avid non-Eurovision fan will recall the flares ABBA donned for Waterloo (1974) or the skirt-ripping of Bucks Fizz in 1981!

When Eurovision flew to Finland in 2007, so did one of Ukraine's biggest comedians. Andriy Mykhailovych Danylko – best known for his drag persona Verka Serduchka – was the real star of the show (literally – Verka Serduchka's trademark is a tinfoil hat with a gigantic star on it).

Danylko took to the stage with the song 'Dancing Lasha Tumbai', a catchy folk-pop track with suggestive choreography and bizarre lyrics in English and German. However, the real meaning of the song's title was hotly debated: was it the Mongolian word for milkshake, as Danylko claimed? Or was it intended to sound a little too like "Russia Goodbye"?

It certainly wasn't the former, as many Mongolians pointed out that Danylko was talking nonsense. Not that

"VERKA SERDUCHKA'S TRADEMARK IS A TINFOIL HAT WITH A GIGANTIC STAR ON IT"

ABBA: taking bell-bottoms to the extreme, are they one of the contest's earliest memes?

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The Eurovision Song Content: Story of Fire Saga

Hollywood heavyweight Will Ferrell has been a fan of Eurovision since his Swedish wife introduced him to it in 1999. He claims it was love at first sight. "We sat down for 3 hours and watched this crazy show... I thought some of this would make a great movie", he told the Eurovision website.

Two decades later, in 2019, Ferrell and co-star Rachel McAdams were spotted in Tel Aviv, using the real-life contest that year as a backdrop for filming a mysterious new project. The Eurovision community was ablaze: could it be that rumours of Ferrell's dreams of making a Eurovision movie were finally coming true?

As it turned out, yes. In June 2020 – when most of the world was still trapped under COVID-19 lockdowns – Netflix dropped *Eurovision: The Story of Fire Saga*. In it, Ferrell and McAdams portray an Icelandic duo from the town of Husavik with their hearts set on winning Eurovision. But winning is never easy, with the duo having to confront backstabbing competitors, bad staging and international politics, to name just a few of the obstacles in their way.

Although the film was great fun, what Eurovision fans loved the most was the soundtrack, which features cameos from some of the best-loved performers of recent years; Conchita Wurst, Loreen and Netta all have their moment in the spotlight.

The real scene-stealer was the heartfelt 'Husavik', a ballad about loving one's hometown vocalised by Swedish singer (and former Junior Eurovision contestant) Molly Sanden. The soft song comes in at the film's crescendo, when Ferrell and McAdams finally make it to the Eurovision stage. It clearly struck a chord, hitting charts all over Europe, and almost winning an Oscar for original songwriting.

Beautiful though 'Husavik' was, the biggest earworm of the film was a fictional Icelandic drinking jingle beloved by a particularly aggressive Husavik parking attendant, whose catchphrase "Play Ja Ja Ding Dong!" was the movie's most meme-able moment. In fact, in 2021, Eurovision got meta with its memes: fans held up signs saying "Play Ja Ja Ding Dong!", while the Icelandic televoting announcer for the year was – you guessed it – Husavik's least-popular parking attendant.

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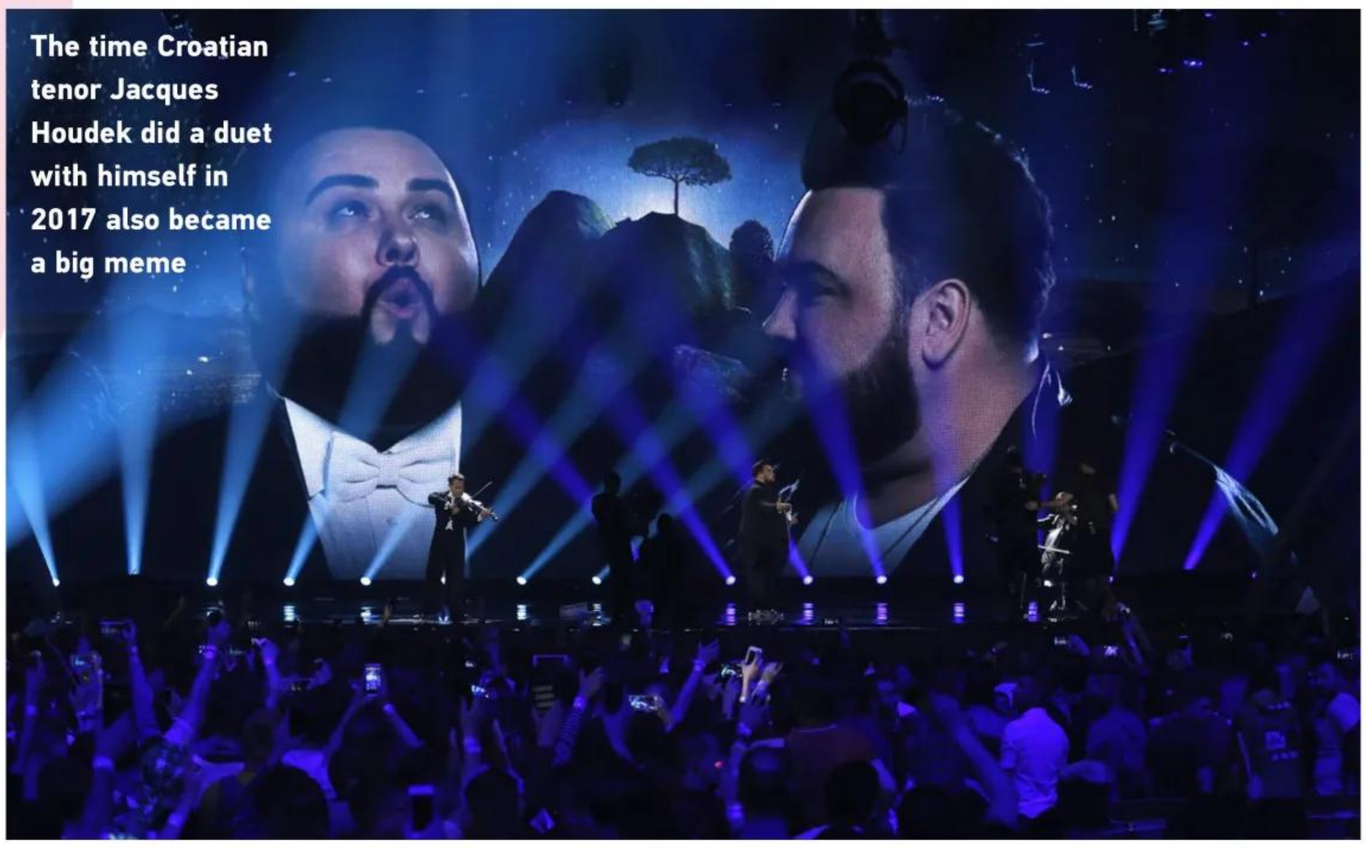

The time Croatian tenor Jacques Houdek did a duet with himself in 2017 also became a big meme

Above: Sweden's hosts Måns Zelmerlöw and comedian Petra Mede make fun of the contest back in 2015

it mattered; the song came second that year and stormed Europe's nightclubs for a summer. Serduchka continues to make cameo appearances, most notably in the Melissa McCarthy caper *Spy* (2015), where Serduchka's lively performance symbolised wacky European musicality.

Going viral

Ukraine's neighbours Moldova have undoubtedly generated the contest's most famous meme. Sunstroke Project may have only placed 22nd in 2010, but one member – Sergey Stepanov – went on to win the hearts and minds of the world with his cool sunglasses and thrusting hips, earning the moniker 'Epic Sax Guy' – a meme that oozes cool.

Epic Sax Guy was so epic that some YouTube users from as far away as the US and Asia sat through ten-hour versions of his Eurovision sax solo to the bitter end. When the band returned to the Eurovision stage in 2017, Europe's televoters roared with joy: not only did Moldova place third that year, Stepanov was given an Order of Honour by the Moldovan president.

Moldova certainly aren't one-trick ponies when it comes to memes: their very first entry in 2005 involved grandmothers collaborating with a punk/ska band, Zdob și

Zdub. Sniffing out a good idea, Russia sent the Buranovskiye Babushki – a choir of adorable grandmothers from a rural part of Russia who clapped their hands, danced, and baked bread live on stage – to Baku in 2012. It came second, so it's clearly a winning Eurovision formula.

Meta memes

But there's more than one way to take the Eurovision meme crown. In 2015 Sweden hosted the contest, and the interval act was something totally unexpected: a parody highlighting all the contest's best-known clichés and paying homage to those entries remembered for all the wrong reasons. "There has to be drums!" exclaimed comedian Petra Mede, "and it doesn't hurt if they're played by topless men. Or, go the opposite way, and use a grandmother".

To relive it all, should you wish to, type 'Love Love Peace Peace' into your search engine for a guaranteed four and a half minutes of laughter.

2019's winner Duncan Laurence may have been one of the highest point-scorers ever, but his song 'Arcade' transcended the Euro-sphere and entered the realm of TikTok. Initially used as a soundtrack by Harry Potter fans making dramatic videos, by the end of 2021 the song had made the top 20 year-end charts in countries such as the US and India, with platinum and gold certifications covering Laurence's walls. Not even COVID-19 could stop the internet getting its Eurovision fix.

Every year brings more Eurovision (comedy) gold, with time-honoured tropes (think hamster wheels, duelling pianos and raunchy dance routines) being wheeled out just moments after songs predicted to be the next European club hit have finished. Already, 2023 is looking set to be a year of hot takes, Twitterstorms and bags of Liverpool-based laughs. Look out for Croatian rocket launchers, TikTok sensations and bearded synthpop Australians. Oh, and more saxophones. It'll be a year to remember, that's for sure.

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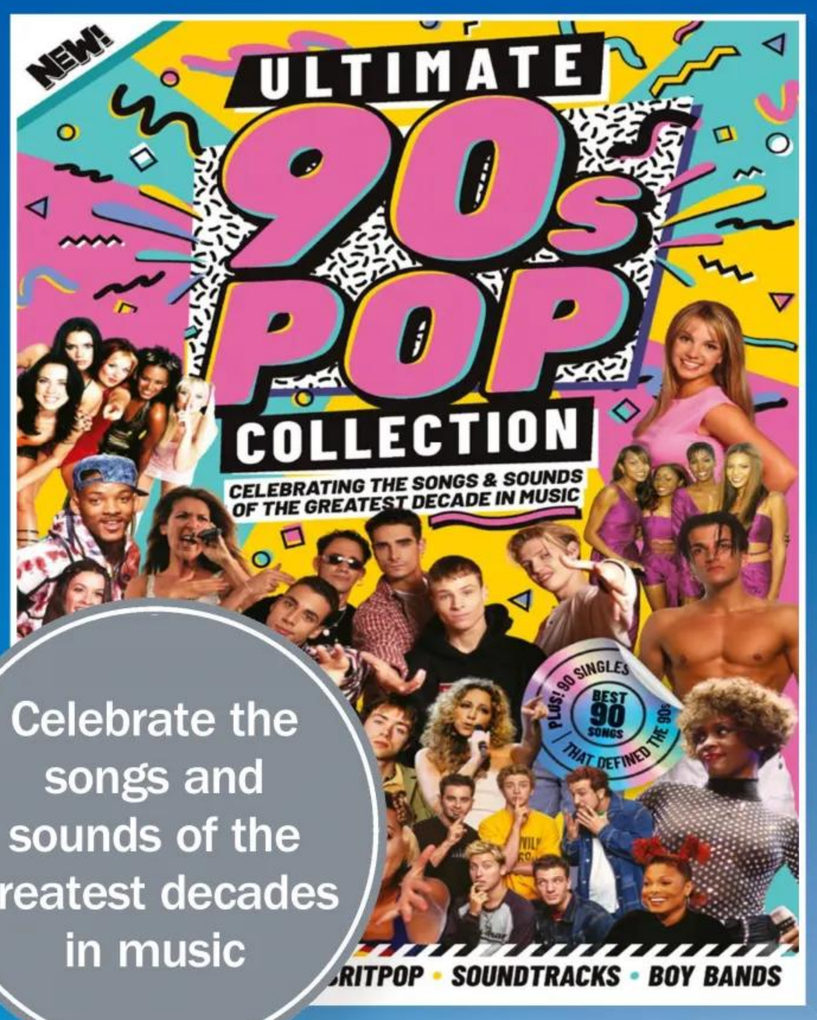

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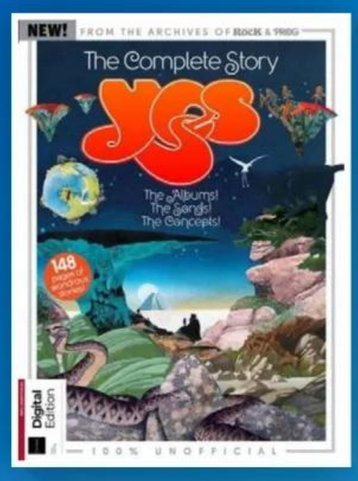

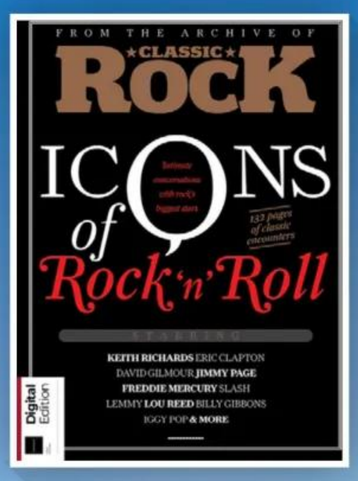

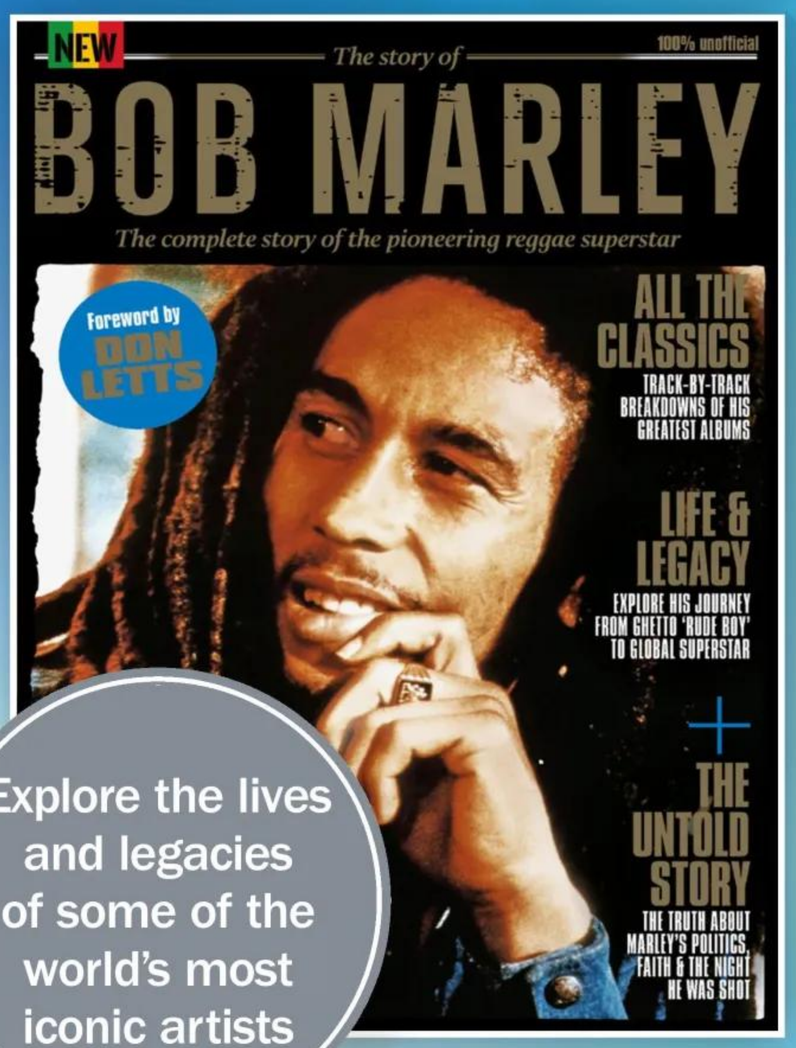

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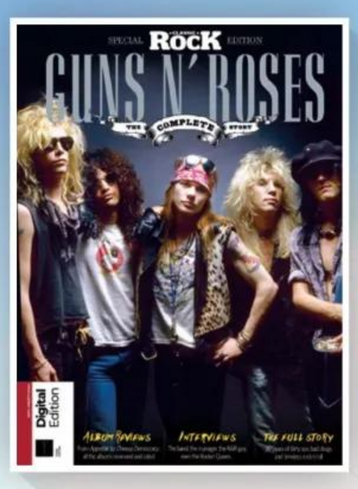

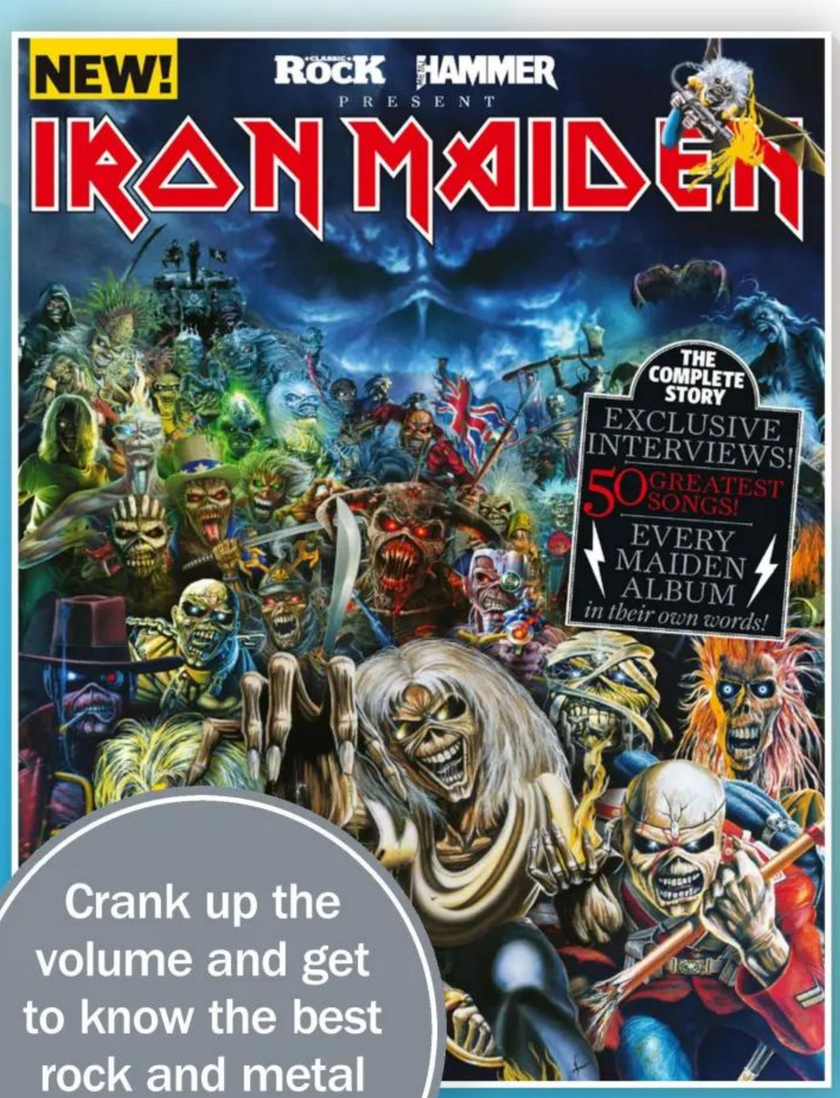

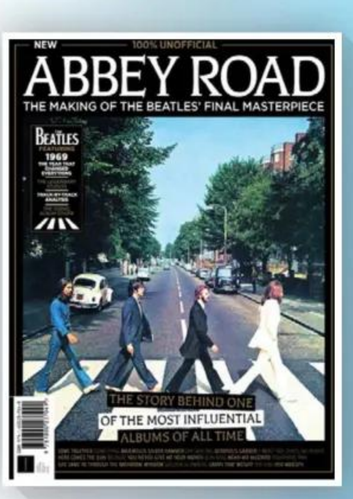

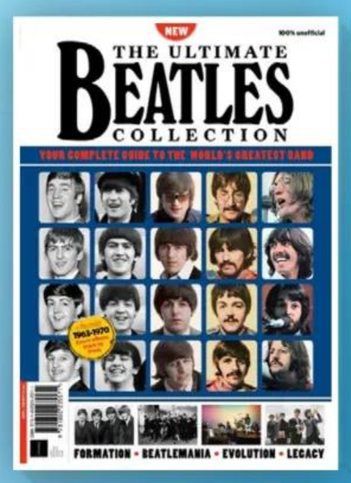

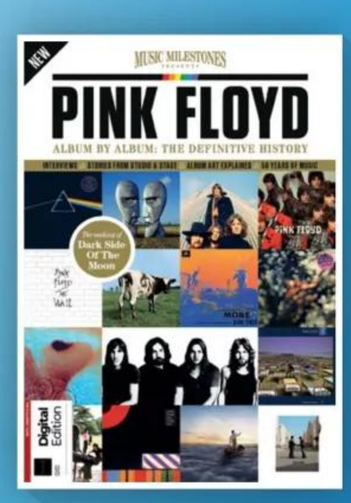

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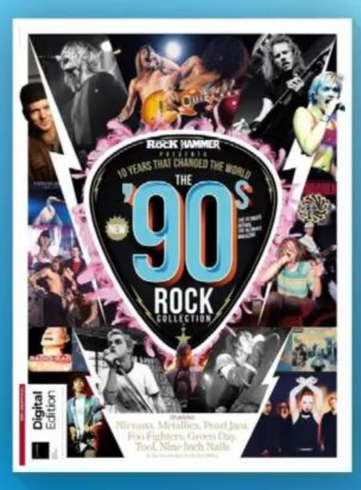

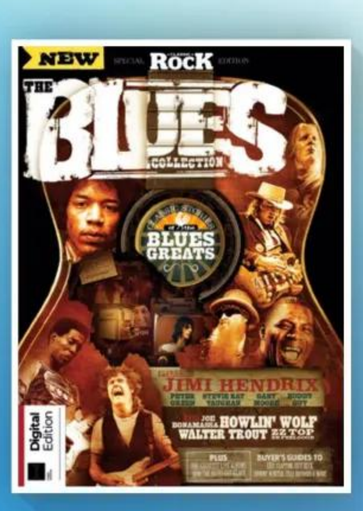

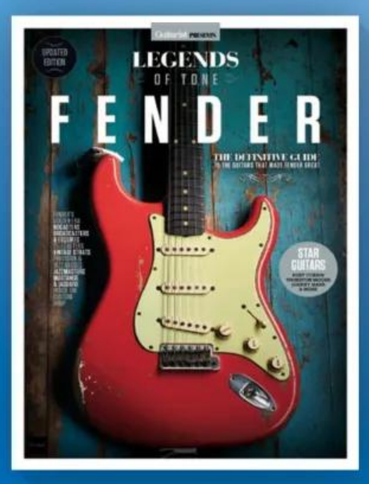

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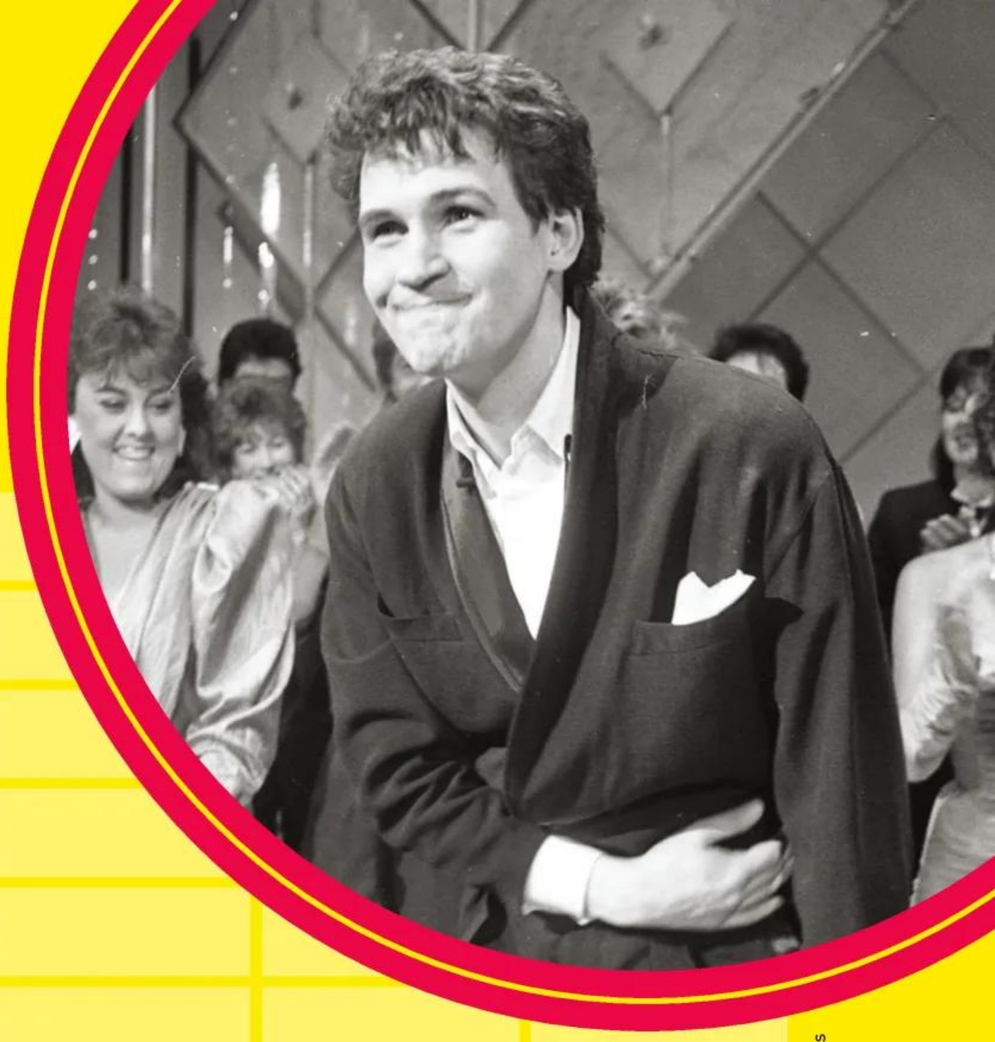

The marvellous Mr Logan, the first person to win Eurovision twice

© Getty Images

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AUSTRIA	"MERCI, CHÉRIE" UDO JÜRGENS	"RISE LIKE A PHOENIX" CONCHITA WURST					
AZERBAIJAN	"RUNNING SCARED" ELL AND NIKKI						
BELGIUM	"J'AIME LA VIE" SANDRA KIM						
DENMARK	"DANSEVISE" GRETHE AND JØRGEN INGMANN	"FLY ON THE WINGS OF LOVE" OLSEN BROTHERS	"ONLY TEARDROPS" EMMELIE DE FOREST				
ESTONIA	"EVERYBODY" TANEL PADAR, DAVE BENTON						
FINLAND	"HARD ROCK HALLELUJAH" LORDI						
FRANCE	"DORS, MON AMOUR" ANDRÉ CLAVEAU	"TOM PILLIBI" JACQUELINE BOYER	"UN PREMIER AMOUR" ISABELLE AUBRET	"UN JOUR, UN ENFANT" FRIDA BOCCARA	"L'OISEAU ET L'ENFANT" MARIE MYRIAM		
GERMANY	"EIN BISSCHEN FRIEDEN" NICOLE	"SATELLITE" LENA					
GREECE	"MY NUMBER ONE" HELENA PAPARIZOU						
IRELAND	"ALL KINDS OF EVERYTHING" DANA	"WHAT'S ANOTHER YEAR" JOHNNY LOGAN	"HOLD ME NOW" JOHNNY LOGAN	"WHY ME?" LINDA MARTIN	"IN YOUR EYES" NIAMH KAVANAGH	"ROCK 'N' ROLL KIDS" PAUL HARRINGTON & CHARLIE MCGETTIGAN	"THE VOICE" EIMEAR QUINN
ISRAEL	"A-BA-NI-BI" IZHAR COHEN & THE ALPHABETA	"HALLELUJAH" MILK AND HONEY	"DIVA" DANA INTERNATIONAL	"TOY" NETTA			
ITALY	"NON HO L'ETÀ" GIGLIOLA CINQUETTI	"INSIEME: 1992" TOTO CUTUGNO	"ZITTI E BUONI" MÅNESKIN				
LATVIA	"I WANNA" MARIE N						
LUXEMBOURG	"NOUS LES AMOUREUX" JEAN-CLAUDE PASCAL	"POUPÉE DE CIRE, POUPÉE DE SON" FRANCE GALL	"APRÈS TOI" VICKY LEANDROS	"TU TE RECONNAÎTRAS" ANNE-MARIE DAVID	"SI LA VIE EST CADEAU" CORINNE HERMÈS		
MONACO	"UN BANC, UN ARBRE, UNE RUE" SÉVERINE						
NETHERLANDS	"NET ALS TOEN" CORRY BROKKEN	"EEN BEETJE" TEDDY SCHOLTEN	"DE TROUBADOUR" LENNY KUHR	"DING-A-DONG" TEACH-IN	"ARCADE" DUNCAN LAURENCE		
NORWAY	"LA DET SWINGE" BOBBYSOCKS!	"NOCTURNE" SECRET GARDEN	"FAIRYTALE" ALEXANDER RYBAK				
PORTUGAL	"AMAR PELOS DOIS" SALVADOR SOBRAL						
RUSSIA	"BELIEVE" DIMA BILAN						
SERBIA	"MOLITVA" MARIJA ŠERIFOVIĆ						
SPAIN	"LA, LA, LA" MASSIEL	"VIVO CANTANDO" SALOMÉ					
SWEDEN	"WATERLOO" ABBA	"DIGGI-LOO DIGGI-LEY" HERREYS	"FÄNGAD AV EN STORMVIND" CAROLA	"TAKE ME TO YOUR HEAVEN" CHARLOTTE NILSSON	"EUPHORIA" LOREEN	"HEROES" MÄNS ZELMERLÖW	"TATTOO" LOREEN
SWITZERLAND	"REFRAIN" LYS ASSIA	"NE PARTEZ PAS SANS MOI" CÉLINE DION					
TURKEY	"EVERYWAY THAT I CAN" SERTAB ERENER						
UKRAINE	"WILD DANCES" RUSLANA	"1944" JAMALA	"STEFANIA" KALUSH ORCHESTRA				
UNITED KINGDOM	"PUPPET ON A STRING" SANDIE SHAW	"BOOM BANG-A-BANG" LULU	"SAVE YOUR KISSES FOR ME" BROTHERHOOD OF MAN	"MAKING YOUR MIND UP" BUCKS FIZZ	"LOVE SHINE A LIGHT" KATRINA AND THE WAVES		
YUGOSLAVIA	"ROCK ME" RIVA						

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